

# LIFE AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN





Much has been written about the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a 20th century 'palace' that once lay at the heart of a British imperial vision of India and later on, as the centre of democratic republicanism in the modern nation of India. However, very little is known about the vast estate that lies behind the facade of the main building. This volume sheds light on the symbiotic and organic oneness between the main building, the home to the president and his/her family, and the vast 330-acre estate, which is currently home to nearly 1000 households.

The microcosm of the estate is, indeed, a vital part of the macro-history of a constantly changing and evolving landscape in the history of India—and, indeed, South Asia. Tracing its origins in the late colonial period where the viceregal families employed numerous family retainers to service the household and estate, this volume also looks into the dynamic transformation in the post-Independence period, during which the estate was reinvented as a democratic space. The intention is to bring out the grandeur of life in the seat of the head of state on one hand and, on the other, the intimacy of life in a small, self-contained community. As a landscape, the Rashtrapati Bhavan is sedimented with memories: of the long-term residents, who have stayed on for generations, as well as the more short-term counterparts, who have been posted at the Rashtrapati Bhavan for a fixed tenure. This volume seeks to recover and re-tell these half-forgotten narratives and has conducted extensive interviews to present a history from below.

As the culminating volume in a series of books documenting the rich social, cultural and historical significance of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, *Life at Rashtrapati Bhavan*, aims to chart out the various forms taken by the building and its estate: from symbol of imperial domination to one of national pride, from private home(s) to a public monument and, more recently, as a model township of the nation.



RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN, NEW DELHI













# LIFE AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

*LEFT. The Rashtrapati Bhavan is the first port of call for visiting heads of state. Seen here is the president of the United States of America, Barack Obama, at his formal reception at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as the chief guest at the Republic Day parade, 2015. He receives the salute from the guard of honour in the forecourt*







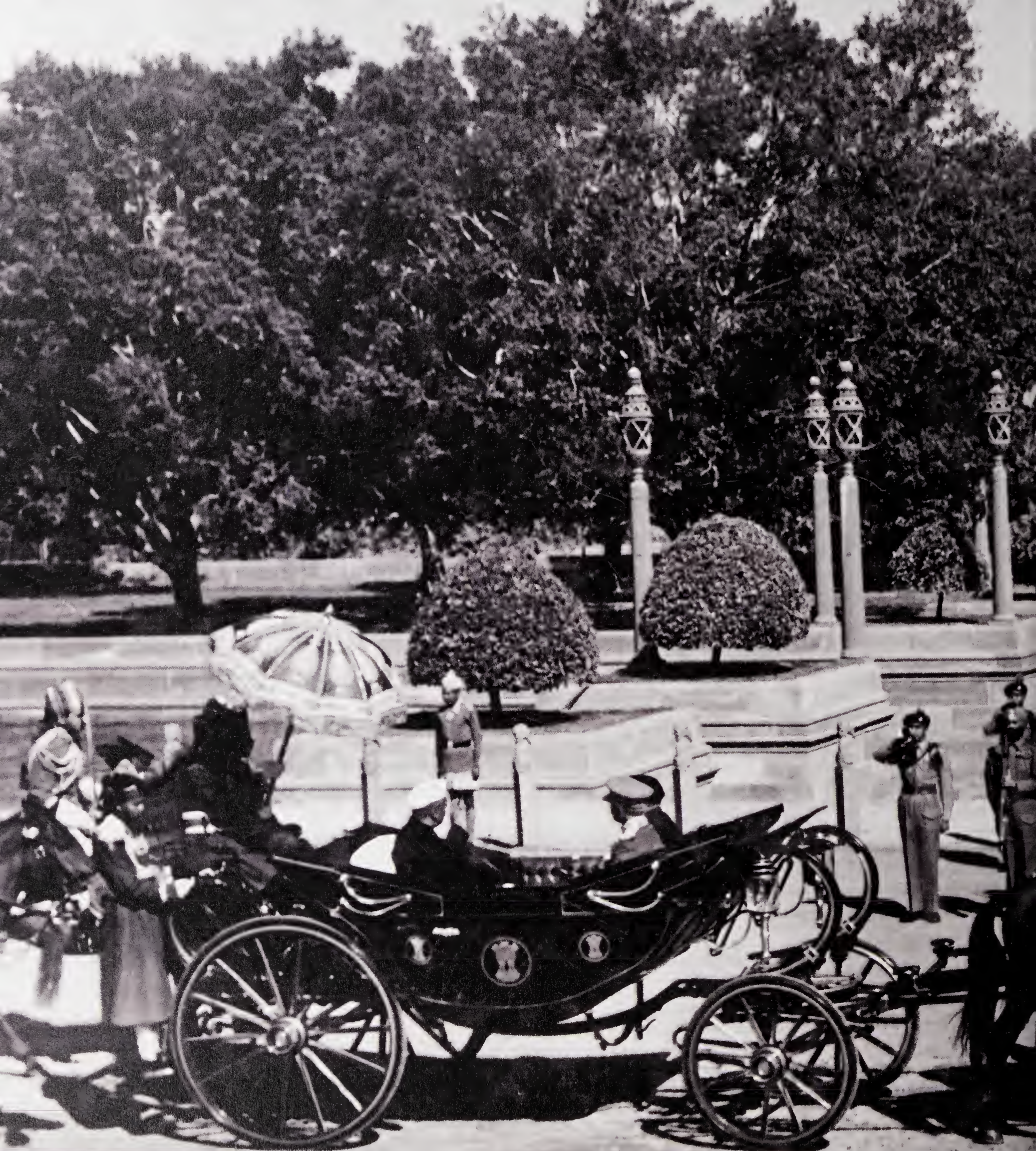
# LIFE AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

Edited by  
Sudha Gopalakrishnan  
&  
Yashaswini Chandra

Photography by  
Dinesh Khanna

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*The first Indian President Rajendra Prasad leaves the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the state carriage, 1952 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*







## LIFE AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

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*The main approach to the Rashtrapati Bhavan leads to three imposing wrought-iron gates and a vast forecourt (Photo by Ram Rahman)*









PRESIDENT

REPUBLIC OF INDIA

## FOREWORD



This volume titled *Life at Rashtrapati Bhavan* is an attempt to record the human history of the residents living in the President's Estate. It is the people who make up this vast space and it is they who have left their imprint on the annals of time. To attempt such a project requires documenting the period under the colonial state right up to the current presidency. The evolution of the Rashtrapati Bhavan has included a daily negotiation with politics, be it debates between freedom fighters and the viceroy or deliberations over the future of the Rashtrapati Bhavan itself. The trappings of the colonial state were gradually done away with when C. Rajagopalachari became its first Indian occupant and later Dr Rajendra Prasad occupied office, when a laborious process towards Indianisation began.

Through the 1970s and 80s, the Rashtrapati Bhavan has faced challenges and national upheavals, which have affected security protocol within and around the estate. Roads within the estate, which were once a main thoroughfare in Lutyens' Delhi, had to be closed to the public, and the early accessibility to the estate that people enjoyed was curtailed in lieu of security restrictions. The 90s brought renewed hope and vigour in the workings of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The latest technologies were used to make the Rashtrapati Bhavan more accessible to the general public. President K.R. Narayanan's endeavour to start a web portal on the Rashtrapati Bhavan was an initiative that has been built on by later presidents. Today, the Rashtrapati Bhavan is open to all, thereby allowing access to its newly opened museum and library. The weekly change of guard, closed to the general public until a few years ago, is now open for public visitation.

In tracing the historical transition of this institution, this volume brings in the perspectives of past and present residents of the estate, the permanent staff of the household and secretariat as well as the officials who have served under different presidencies. The images in this volume give visual expression to the rich narratives of history and politics.

I hope this volume earns its praise and contributes to preserving as well as modernising an important part of our national heritage. It gives me great pleasure to note that this is the last volume in a series documenting the different aspects of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. I wish the volume and series well!

PRANAB MUKHERJEE  
PRESIDENT OF INDIA

DECEMBER 2016  
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN, NEW DELHI







# PREFACE



This volume on life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan is the 13th and culminating volume in the series of books brought out to capture and present various facets of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. This volume concludes the three-year Multi-Volume Documentation Project of Rashtrapati Bhavan, under which 11 out of the 13 volumes have been brought out by the President's Secretariat in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and Sahapedia.

This volume brings together the lives of countless individuals who have been associated with this place since its inception. The chapters help explain the transition of the President's House as the reins of power shifted from the British Empire to a modern republic. The early presidents who occupied office in independent India made sincere attempts to Indianise the colonial building. This was reflected in the frugality with which official functions were conducted and in the way Hindustani traditions were incorporated in the interiors.

The 1980s saw an increasing concern about security which led to greater restrictions on public access while the 90s was a period when the Rashtrapati Bhavan saw its first mobile phones, internet connection and a website. The relationship between the public and the monument is explained in light of the changing contours of security protocol. For glimpses into the everyday life of the estate, oral interviews have helped bring out voices which are left out usually in the mainstream narrative that flows out of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. A cross-section of individuals from gardeners and butlers to room attendants and members of the military and civilian staff lend a voice to a place that is now in its 13th presidency.

The current presidency has attempted to redefine the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a heritage, hi-tech, humane and happy township. As an avowed goal, it pursued a vision to open up the Rashtrapati Bhavan to greater public access, an attempt which can be traced to the days of President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. The book highlights its role in transforming the Rashtrapati Bhavan into a knowledge hub, opening it to scholars, intellectuals and members of civil society, who have participated in several ongoing programmes. It also highlights our commitment to the restoration, preservation and conservation of our heritage, including the establishment of a state-of-the-art museum complex. The timely execution of the Multi-Volume Documentation Project based on an extensive intellectual, research and documentation exercise is another of our achievements. We thank our partners, IGNCA, Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and Sahapedia.

I hope with this final volume, as with the rest of the volumes of the series, the understanding of the Rashtrapati Bhavan by the common people would be enriched.

OMITA PAUL  
SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT  
DECEMBER 2016  
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN, NEW DELHI

*Room attendant Vipin Kumar carrying a freshly laundered suit to one of the rooms in the guest wing*

*NEXT PAGE. A recent appointee to the Rashtrapati Bhavan gazes pensively at the series of the photos of the last 12 presidents that line the wall of the reception room of the Rashtrapati Bhavan*



VISITOR  
MANAGEMENT CELL

RECEPTION OFFICE



DR. B. S. CHANDRA



DR. B. S. CHANDRA



DR. B. S. CHANDRA



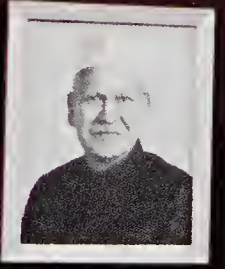
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DR. B. S. CHANDRA



DR. B. S. CHANDRA



DR. B. S. CHANDRA









# CHRONOLOGY



YEAR	DELHI	INDIA
1911	King-Emperor of India, George V, announces the shift in capital from Calcutta to New Delhi	Partition of Bengal revoked
1914		Over 140000 Indian soldiers participated in World War I at various theatres of war from western Europe to Africa and the Middle East
1918		World War I ends as Germany signs the Armistice on 11 November and the Indian soldiers return home
1926	Lord Irwin becomes viceroy of India	
1930		Mahatma Gandhi begins his march to the coastal village of Dandi on 12 March. Numerous villagers join his struggle and participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement against colonial rule
1931	Inauguration of New Delhi on 13 February Lord Willingdon becomes viceroy of India on 18 April	After a series of meetings with M.K. Gandhi in the Viceroy's House, Viceroy Lord Irwin signs the Irwin-Gandhi Pact on 5 March
1935		Government of India Act is passed granting a large measure of autonomy to Indians to legislate and execute at the provincial level
1936	Lord Linlithgow becomes viceroy of India	
1939		World War II breaks out and British India officially declares war on Nazi Germany in September
1942		The Quit India Movement is launched at the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee
1943	The commander-in-chief of the Indian Army, Lord Wavell, is made viceroy of India	The Bengal famine results in over 3 million deaths
1945		End of World War II and the Simla Conference is convened to agree on and approve the Wavell Plan. However, the talks fail
1947	Lord Wavell resigns as viceroy and is replaced by Lord Mountbatten on 20 February  Lord Mountbatten continues to serve as the governor general of modern India	Owing to increasing communal conflicts, British India is partitioned and the new modern nations of India and Pakistan are granted independence on 15 and 14 August respectively  Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is appointed the first prime minister of independent India  A newly formed constituent assembly is convened and sets about the task of writing a new constitution for India
1948	C. Rajagopalachari is appointed governor general on 21 June	



1949		The Constitution of India is adopted by the constituent assembly on 26 November
1950	Rajendra Prasad is elected the first President of India	
1952		First general elections are held by modern independent India
1962	S. Radhakrishnan is elected President of India	Indo-China War breaks out in the end of September
1965		Indo-Pakistan War breaks out between April and September
1967	Zakir Husain is elected President of India	
1969	Following the death in office of Zakir Hussain, the vice president, V.V. Giri, is appointed President of India  V.V. Giri soon resigns and successfully contests for President of India as an independent candidate	Under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, 14 banks and insurance companies are nationalised
1971		Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 breaks out in December and leads to the establishment of the new republic of Bangladesh
1974	Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed is elected President of India	
1975		Emergency is declared and officially issued by President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed on 25 June, severely curbing fundamental rights of citizens
1977	Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed is the second president to die in office  Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy is elected President of India	Emergency is lifted 21 months after it was first declared
1982	Giani Zail Singh is elected President of India	
1984		Operation Bluestar leads to the subsequent assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi  Brutal anti-Sikh riots follow
1987	R Venkataraman is elected President of India	
1991		Economic Liberalisation brought about under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao
1992	Shankar Dayal Sharma is elected President of India	
1997	K.R. Narayanan is elected President of India	
1999		Kargil War between India and Pakistan lasts from May to July
2002	A.P.J. Abdul Kalam is elected President of India	
2007	Pratibha Devisingh Patil is elected President of India	
2012	Pranab Mukherjee is elected President of India	

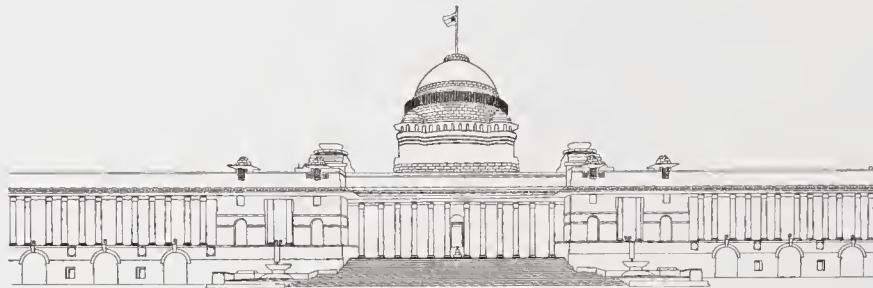












## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION



Sudha Gopalakrishnan

**T**his is an account of one of the greatest buildings of the world not for the architectural masterpiece that it is, but in terms of the life that permeates and lends it soul. The magnificent edifice of the Rashtrapati Bhavan remains largely unchanged nearly a century since it was constructed, but its use and meaning have been radically transformed. It marks the transformation of India from a British colony to an independent democracy; it remains a public monument and a private home.

One problem for a book that comes at the end of a series is the extent to which it encapsulates ideas from earlier volumes. This volume, the last in the Multi-Volume Documentation Project of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, chooses a more intimate focus, trying to unpack the sedimentary layers of life as lived at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. This imposing and vast edifice has a story—or rather, many stories—to tell, which extend from its colonial history to the present day. The diverse aspects of the Rashtrapati Bhavan discussed in the earlier volumes become a backdrop to the present one, which illuminates many of the theses put forth in the earlier volumes. While the previous volumes dwelt on its landscape, architecture, art, culture and food traditions as well as allied institutions such as the President's Bodyguard and the presidential retreats, this book presents the interplay of both history and story, garnered through documenting events and experiences of the people who made this monumental estate their home.

The stories told in the course of this book have been drawn from the collective and individual experiences of the people who inhabited the Rashtrapati Bhavan from the days of the Raj and the times of the different presidents of independent India, to the present. The sources come from archival records as well as the accounts of the inhabitants of the presidential home and estate today. The book also documents the significance of the multiple contributions made by President Pranab Mukherjee in transforming the premises of the Rashtrapati Bhavan into the 'smart' city that it is today and the impact of such changes on the lives of the people there. It also documents the commitment and collaboration of the presidential team to usher in this transformation.

*PREVIOUS PAGE. The Durbar Hall is prepared for a state event*

*An entrance into the Yellow Room flanked by a pair of Lutyens' classical lion head fountains (Photo by Ram Rahman)*







The following chapters take off from this background to illustrate the makeover of the Rashtrapati Bhavan from its viceregal origins through subsequent presidencies to the present day. This historical and spatial background, including colonial life and that of Indianising the colonial legacy after Independence, has to be borne in mind to appreciate the present situation of the site, as much as the more recent context of the modernisation of the Rashtrapati Bhavan while retaining many of its hallowed traditions. Thus, the chapters in this book are classified into two sections—‘the history of Rashtrapati Bhavan’ and ‘Rashtrapati Bhavan today’. The nature of the two sections is slightly different; the first consists of overviews whereas the second takes an experiential look at more intimate aspects of life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Together, the chapters impart a sense of life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan at the macro and micro levels, as it is seen as a stage (even a character) in history, even as the memories and experiences of generations of past and present, short- and long-term occupants of the estate are documented. The intention is to bring out the grandeur of life in the seat of the head of state on one hand and, on the other, the intimacy of life in a small, self-contained community. Central to the understanding of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a living site of memory is the harmonisation of its many public and private narratives. Dedicated to a deeper investigation of the encounters with history as lived-life, this book is largely based on anecdotes from the entire period of the Rashtrapati Bhavan’s existence as recorded in archival textual sources and as oral histories. The historical gaps and uneven records that confront such a project are dealt with by recovering as much information from written records, as from oral resources available, to examine the connection/contestation between institutional practices and the present environment.

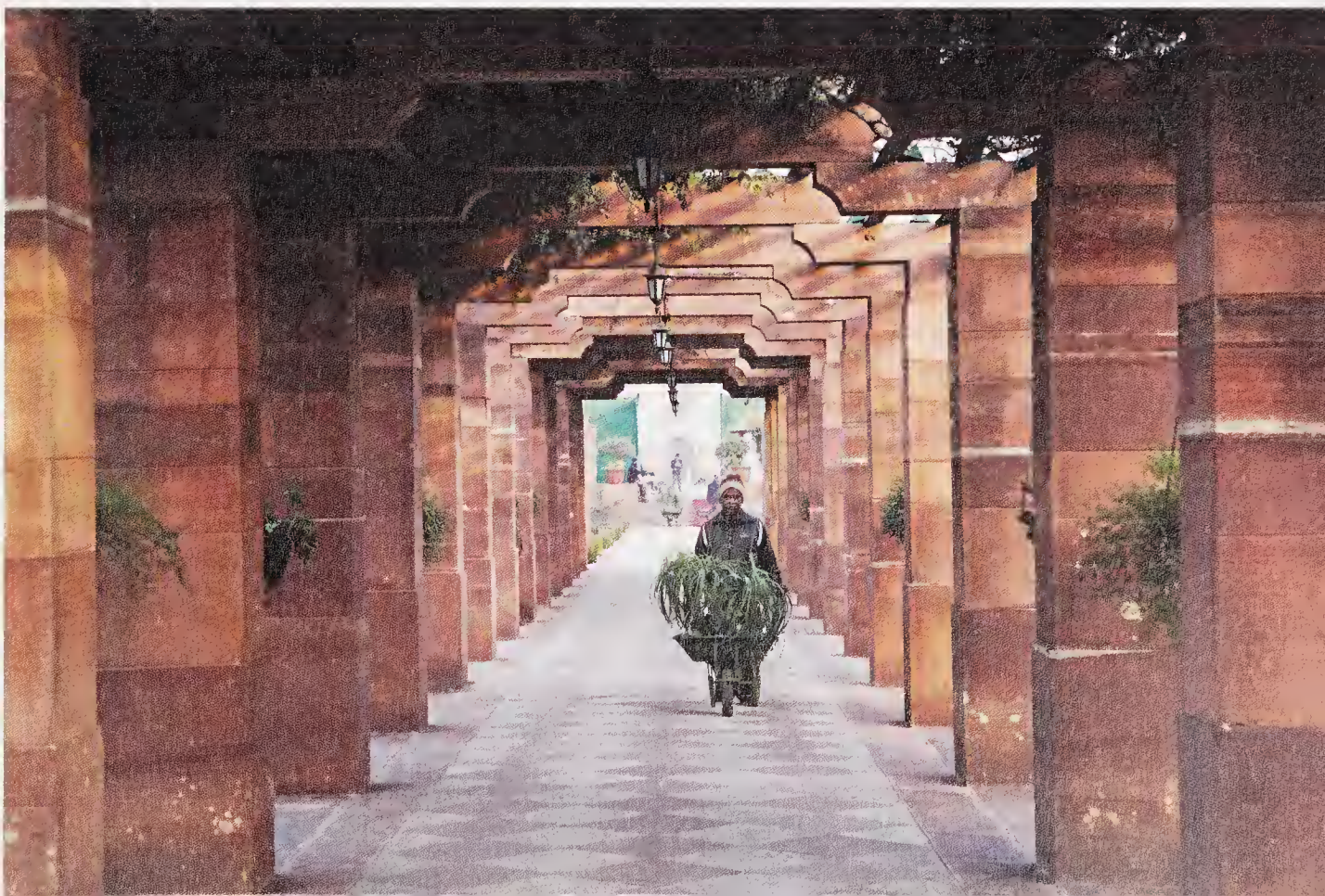
The first chapter by Yashaswini Chandra discusses the Viceroy’s House as the premier home of the Raj and demonstrates the original lifestyles that the estate was designed for, including the luxurious lives led by the British upper classes and the limited scope of the lives of the Indian subjects. It attempts to discuss life across the divide of the main house and the surrounding estate and across the racial divide. It concludes with sections devoted to the final years of the Raj and the first year of Independence as racial barriers began to crumble and the Viceroy’s House, recast as Government House, became the setting for the birth of modern South Asia.

The following chapter, also by Yashaswini Chandra, examines the struggle to transform the viceregal seat, until recently the centre of imperial ambition and power, in the years following Independence into an institution that combined stateliness with democratic ideals. It juxtaposes presidential experiences and initiatives with the memories of the ordinary residents of the estate. It uncovers the motivations of the different presidents as they engaged with the estate in the light of changing national realities and then the effect on the everyday lives of

*TOPMOST. One of the many tree lined avenues in the President’s Estate*

*FROM LEFT TO RIGHT AND THEN BELOW. The dedicated malis are devoted to looking after the expansive green cover within the President’s Estate as seen through the different seasons (Photos by Narendra Bisht)*







the estate. It argues that the world of the President's Estate, as secluded as it is on one hand, has not been aloof from the developments undergone by the nation at large on the other hand.

The third chapter by Hilal Ahmed marks a departure from the rest of the chapters as it offers the outsider's perspective and highlights the public character of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Evoking the idea of a 'public monument', a specific form in which certain buildings were officially recognised and presented in postcolonial India, the chapter examines the modes in which the Rashtrapati Bhavan is commemorated as representative of Indian republicanism. Although the chapter does not engage with the direct political questions associated with the changing political role of the institution of the president, it makes an attempt to problematise the discursively constituted idea of republicanism in the postcolonial context. Precisely because of this reason, the Rashtrapati Bhavan and its various publics turn out to be a reference point for an informed discussion on the official meanings of the state in India. With this chapter concludes the section on the history of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The next section consisting of three chapters is concerned with recent times. They are more 'localised' in nature in comparison with the previous overviews as they reflect on specific elements and small details of life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Based almost entirely on oral histories, the fourth and fifth chapters by Surajit Sarkar examine the lived experience within the estate through such hubs as the main building and the sites within the estate. They shed light on moments, anecdotes and narratives that often escape official documentation. These chapters present a social history of the Rashtrapati Bhavan's different divisions, highlighting the sense of service and community that binds the short- and long-term employees. These oral histories reveal how residents strive to maintain a quality of life by bringing a structured informality into the everyday when personal and domestic intersect with the professional. Even if some of the recollections of the interviewees may appear factually incorrect or contradictory, the slippages are indicators of the afterlife and legacy of individuals and events within the estate.

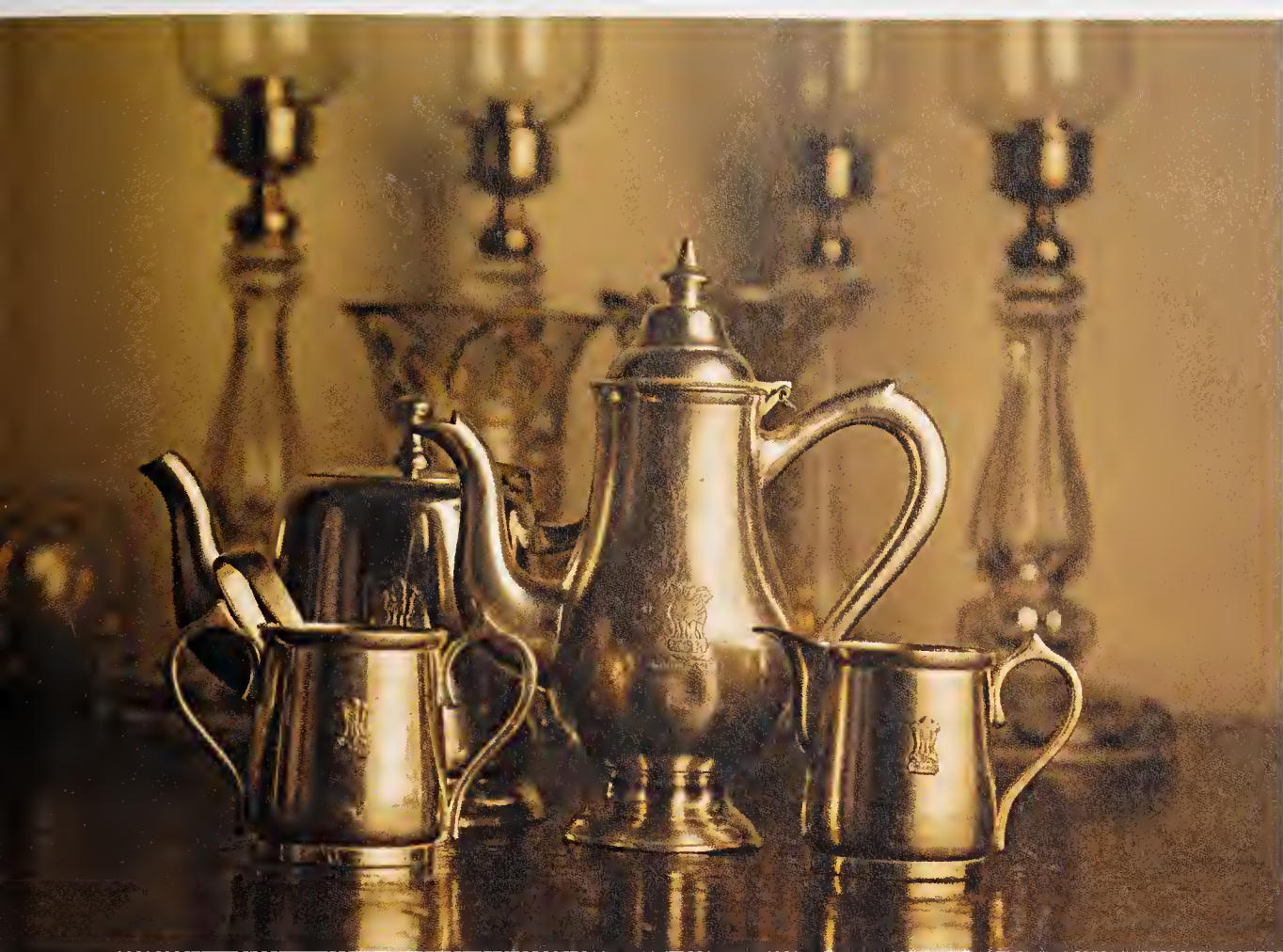
The concluding chapter halts in the present moment to document the legacy of the current presidency of Pranab Mukherjee. It charts the impact of the initiatives of the President's Secretariat based on the president's vision, on the lives of those living within the estate as well as on the various visitors (both national and international) who have been welcomed into the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the last five years. It has been the aim of the presidency to create a model township for the rest of the country to follow based on the principles of 'heritage, high-tech, humane and happiness', and this chapter identifies the various steps and initiatives undertaken to realise this vision.

*TOP TWO IMAGES. The Rashtrapati Bhavan is a repository of old, quaint objects. As opposed to the period after Independence, when silver cutlery and crockery were in vogue, the viceregal dinner service consisted of ceramic crockery, often embossed with portraits of British sovereigns*

*BOTTOM IMAGE. Household attendant Devidutt laying out the table in the guest wing of the Rashtrapati Bhavan*

*NEXT PAGE. The banquet hall is prepared for a state dinner*









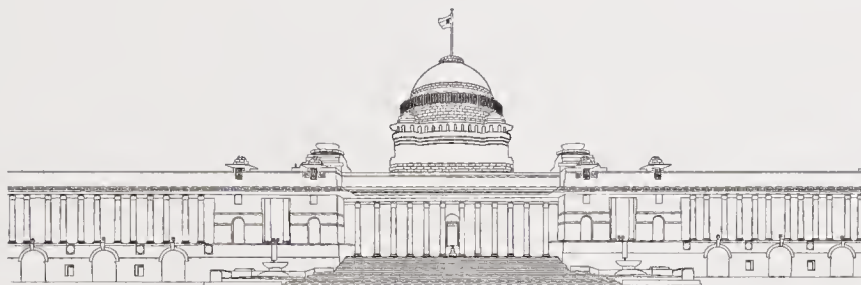












## SECTION I

# THE HISTORY OF RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

*Such red-sandstone sculptures of lions are ubiquitous at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, originally representative of the British crown (Photo by Ram Raliman)*





## CHAPTER 2

# A HOME FOR THE RAJ



Yashaswini Chandra

There is a photo from the Linlithgow regime of a private pool-side party at the Viceroy's House (1938).<sup>1</sup> It features Lord Linlithgow's daughter, Lady Doreen, and one of his assistant private secretaries from the Indian Civil Services (ICS), Eric Kitchen. Rather a smart pair, in the mould of 'bright young things', they are perched on the diving board. In the background is Lord Linlithgow in a robe himself. Further in the background is the ubiquitous liveried figure of the Indian attendant.

No account of colonial high living is complete without the inevitable prop of the Indian domestic worker. In his biography of Lord Irwin, Andrew Roberts describes the stereotypical photos of one of Irwin's aide-de-camps (ADCs) as consisting of black-and-white snapshots of 'moustachioed officers lounging about in wicker chairs wearing jodhpurs and reading the *Daily Telegraph* with their dalmatians at their feet; Lady Irwin presenting the prizes at the Delhi Horse Show . . . young ladies in flapper hats and long strings of pearls; chukkers of bicycle polo; and everywhere dutiful liveried servants smiling from behind their vast whiskers'.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to imagine what these Indian servants thought as they waited on viceregal parties.<sup>3</sup> They were serving in the foremost establishment of the Raj. However, they could not have remained unaffected by the changes afoot in India. When Mahatma Gandhi visited Lord Irwin at the Viceroy's House on 17 February 1930, the servants were agog with excitement, hanging at the door through which Gandhi entered.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the spectacle of the inauguration of New Delhi—the *pièce de résistance* of which was the Viceroy's House—would be overshadowed by that 'of this one time Middle Temple lawyer, now seditious fakir . . . striding half-naked up the stairs of the Viceroy's palace, there to negotiate and parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor,' as scathingly described by Winston Churchill.

## LIFE ACROSS THE RACIAL DIVIDE

The dividing line in life at the viceregal estate was race often explained in terms of class. The British residents constituted the cast of characters, the Indians mainly the extras, the distinction easily maintained since the officer class remained the preserve of the British. It was only during the penultimate viceroyalty of Lord Wavell that a scant gesture towards the Indianisation of the officialdom of the Raj was made at the Viceroy's House as the Governor General's Bodyguard (GGBG) received an Indian adjutant, Captain Sahibzada

*This dramatic photo captures the challenge of maintaining such a grand residence as household staff climb up and literally crawl into one of the monumental gilded lamps—especially designed by Lutyens—to polish it, 1931 (Source: COUNTRY LIFE magazine)*









ABOVE. Lady and Lord Lytton host a picnic with their European aides and guests surrounded by an entourage of liveried Indian attendants under a banyan tree in the viceregal retreat in Barrackpore, late 1870s. Such lavish entertaining was typical of colonial high living facilitated by an extensive Indian staff. To the left of Lord Lytton is his daughter Lady Emily, later the wife of Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect of the Viceroy's House in New Delhi (Source: Alkazi Collection of Photography, New Delhi)

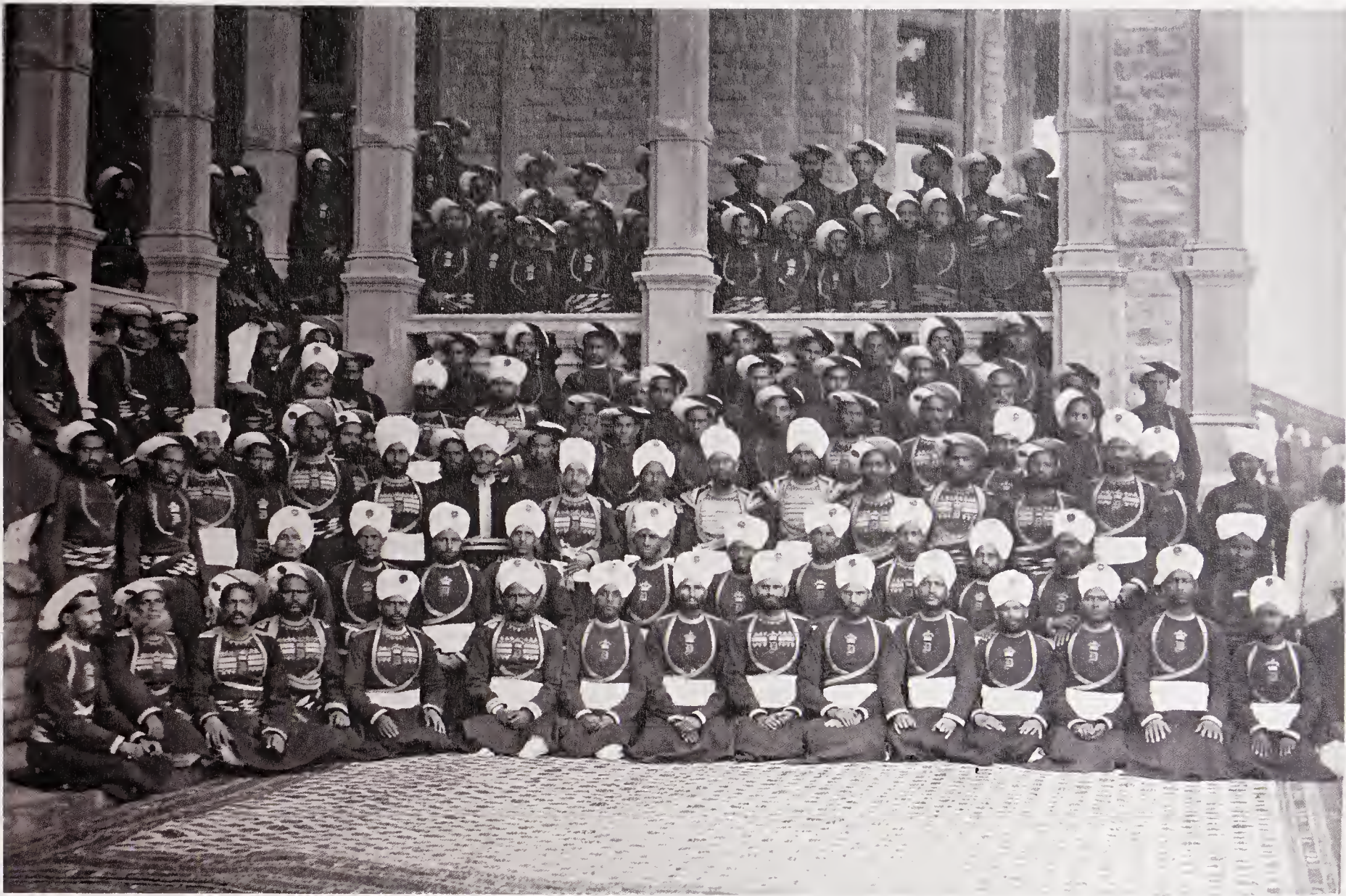
FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE. The large viceregal staff pose for a group photo in a verandah of the Viceregal Lodge in Simla, late 1880s. Viceregal attendants were kitted in elaborate uniform consisting of a red 'chupkan' worn over white trousers and decorated on the front with the viceroy's personal coat-of-arms. Different ranks wore either a twisted cord turban or a 'lungi' style one (Source: Alkazi Collection of Photography, New Delhi)

Three attendants at the Viceroy's House in New Delhi. The one in the centre wears Lord Mountbatten's personal insignia as the crest on his tunic (Source: Alkazi Collection of Photography, New Delhi, photo by Homai Vyarawalla)

The Governor General's Bodyguard used to mount guard at the main gate of the Viceroy's House, their splendid sight frequently referred to in colonial accounts (Source: National Science Museum, UK)

Another photo depicting the elaborate lifestyle of the Raj, with the viceregal set-up being at the top, even during wartime, as guests are entertained in the Mughal Garden (Source: Imperial War Museum, UK, photo by Sir Cecil Beaton)









*ABOVE. Notwithstanding their sartorial differences, as represented by Gandhi's 'dhoti' and shawl and Mountbatten's Savile Row suit, Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Mountbatten enjoy a moment of bonhomie in the Viceroy's House*



Mohammad Yakub Khan, in November 1946. The first Indian ADC, Lieutenant R.K. Gandhi, joined Lord Mountbatten's viceregal staff only one day before Independence on 14 August 1947. The civil servants as well as the military officials at the Viceroy's House remained almost entirely British right until the very end.<sup>5</sup>

The British side of the divide was not uniform since it included the viceregal family and their guests, different categories of officials and some European servants. The longest-serving viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, brought the largest 'private party' of Europeans to the house: his wife, Lady Linlithgow, his daughters, Anne, Joan and Doreen, his secretary, Ruby Hill, a governess for Doreen, a nurse, three lady's maids, a valet, and a masseuse.<sup>6</sup> Government of India appointees to his personal (officer) staff comprised a private secretary, two assistant private secretaries, a military secretary, a comptroller of the household, six ADCs and a doctor.<sup>7</sup> Lord Mountbatten would later add a few new posts to his staff, such as a chief of staff and press attaché, which would be the precursors to many top posts that continue to date on the president's staff.<sup>8</sup> The heads of establishments such as the housekeeper, the superintendent of the viceregal stables and the head gardener were also British during the different viceregalities.<sup>9</sup> The European servants and the ADCs lived in the main house as the closest attendants and aides to the family respectively. Members of the personal staff were accommodated in bungalows within the estate, which included the four grandest ones designed by Lutyens. During Lord Linlithgow's tenure, these four bungalows were occupied by the military secretary, the comptroller, the private secretary and the doctor.<sup>10</sup>

The use of European servants by viceregal families seems to have been a contentious issue and in the handover notes from Lord Reading to Lord Irwin, the outgoing viceroy cautioned the incoming one against bringing too many European servants along with him: 'Every attempt should be made to limit the number of European servants in India. There is a distinct tendency for the European to deteriorate and to cause trouble: unless he is a level-headed good servant, his head will be turned by having so many Indian servants to wait upon him, and generally by the atmosphere of deference paid to him by the Indian establishment'.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, at least the Linlithgows seemed to have depended on a core domestic staff of Europeans and perhaps Lord Linlithgow's valet, a Mr White, proved just the 'level-headed' sort to be waited on in turn by Indian servants without losing his head. One of his duties seems to have been supervising the viceregal dogs; and he was the 'tower of strength in all these matters and always saw to all these details, the dogs being in the

right place at the right time and so on – a great man', recalled Pat Southby, one of Lord Linlithgow's ADC.<sup>12</sup> The European valet became the superintendent of the household servants.<sup>13</sup>

After the viceregal family, the most exalted citizens of the estate were the personal staff. They would become the closest companions of the family, especially since the families were often new to India as opposed to the members of the staff, usually old India hands from the ICS and the Indian Armed Forces. Lord Irwin described his staff as a happy family.<sup>14</sup> If the Linlithgow daughters Doreen and Joan were seen partying and riding with an assistant secretary and an ADC respectively,<sup>15</sup> another daughter, Anne, was known to play tennis with the ADCs.<sup>16</sup> Lord Mountbatten's daughter Pamela would go nightclubbing with the ADCs in the makeshift nightclub in the house of Brigadier K. Cariappa.<sup>17</sup>

Viceregal families would often have lunch and dinner with the personal staff along with guests, albeit seated according to the warrant of precedence, which determined a person's place on the dining table, and indeed the Raj, in relation to the viceroy at the top of it.<sup>18</sup> A special house guest of the Linlithgows was Sir Edwin Lutyens on his last trip to India. In keeping with his playful nature, he would flout protocol and the warrant of precedence, and sit with the ADCs at the corner of the table and pop in and out.<sup>19</sup> It was just as well that there would be a number of guests to meals in the family and staff dining room usually a full house with 35 persons at the height of the Delhi season<sup>20</sup> since such a large house might have felt daunting, even lonely, if only one family were using it. Another house guest of the Linlithgows, Francis Tudsberry, remembered it as such: 'Our rooms are on the second floor, in the western block of the South Court – but don't for a moment imagine that such a description would enable anyone to find us, who has not lived here for several years: to do so it would be necessary to have a map, plan, a compass, theodolite, directory, guide-book, tourist-outfit and a bicycle!'<sup>21</sup> Members of the staff also seem to have socialised and entertained in their bungalows in the estate at events attended by their colleagues and houseguests from the main house. Tudsberry attended one such cocktail party in the house of Sir Gilbert Laithwaite, the private secretary to the viceroy.<sup>22</sup> The house of the viceroy and those of the senior officials were built to impress and entertain.

The viceroy's role encompassed both administrative and social duties. His way of life had been set in previous viceregal residences in Calcutta, Simla–Mashobra and the provisional lodgings in Delhi.<sup>23</sup> The viceroys in the Viceroy's House would live a life based on this legacy, but also reflecting the final phase of the









Raj. In fulfilling his duties, the viceroy was expected to be ably supported by his wife, the vicereine, in the manner of a queen consort. In fact, she had become such an important component of the institution of the viceroy by the time the Viceroy's House was occupied that correspondence between the then viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, and the prime minister in Great Britain, Neville Chamberlain, discussing potential candidates to succeed as viceroy also extended to the wives.<sup>24</sup> An otherwise 'first-class' candidate, G. Anderson, was considered seriously handicapped by Lord Linlithgow by 'the absence of a wife . . . particularly in these days when Indian women are coming rapidly to the fore'.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the most self-assured of the vicereines was Lady Willingdon who had honed her skills as a high memsahib when Lord Willingdon served as the governor of the presidencies of Bombay and Madras and then as the governor general of Canada, before being appointed viceroy. 'Lady W' is perhaps best remembered (besides her love of the colour mauve) for making changes to the Viceroy's House showing little regard for Lutyens' design vision. Having found sympathetic patronesses in the previous three vicereines, Ladies Hardinge, Reading and Irwin, he met his nemesis in Lady W. Lord Willingdon's own ADC, Lieutenant Meysey George Dallas Clive, compiled a list of 23 items relating to the 'damage done to the fabric, furniture and gardens of the Viceroy's House . . . [such as] red lights placed at the four corners of the dome to signify that Their Excellencies are in residence . . . [and] the introduction of certain vulgarities such as flood lighting in the Moghul garden'.<sup>26</sup> Fortunately for Lutyens, Lady Willingdon was the aberration in his relationship with viceregal chatelaines as her successor, Lady Linlithgow, invited him back to Delhi to overturn the changes.<sup>27</sup> However, one major change was retained: the Qajar painting and Persian style wall paintings on the ceiling of the ballroom, now the Ashoka Hall, lavish imagery that the Rashtrapati Bhavan has since come to be closely associated with.<sup>28</sup> The impression of high-handedness is one side of a forceful personality; on the other side, Lady Willingdon was an indomitable fundraiser and organiser of events.<sup>29</sup> In 1946, when Lord Mountbatten was chosen to be the viceroy to see India through to Independence, it helped that the prime minister, Clement Attlee, thought that he was 'blessed with a very unusual wife', as is discussed in the next section.<sup>30</sup>

*FACING PAGE. It was Lady Willingdon who commissioned the itinerant Italian painter Collonello to paint in the Qajar style of Persian paintings on the ceiling of the ballroom, currently known as the Ashoka Hall. In this photo, a pair of bodyguards from the President's Bodyguard stand in the minstrel's gallery as the PBG mounts the ceremonial guard at a state occasion (Photo by Saurabh Oliver Sinclair)*







The separate work lives of the viceregal couple included the hours he spent in his office, and those that she spent on official engagements such as meeting with charities, visiting schools and hospitals and giving prizes. However, they socialised and entertained as part of their official duties as a couple. Lady Reading's 'social secretary', Yvonne FitzRoy,<sup>31</sup> and Francis Tudsberry give a dizzying account of the viceregal social calendar consisting of endless rounds of parties, balls, lunches, dinners, polo matches, horse shows and parades.

But nothing could compare to a party at the Viceroy's House, as remembered by the quintessential daughter of the Raj, Iris Portal.<sup>32</sup> You had basically arrived if you were invited to dine with the viceroy. In a letter to her family in England, a visitor to India, Muriel McKnight described the experience of attending a viceregal dinner and ball.<sup>33</sup> She gushed about 'sailing up the marble staircase with the gorgeous bodyguard on either side', the attentive ADCs, the elaborate ceremony of being introduced to important guests such as the governor of Madras, the maharaja of Bikaner ('such a good looking man') and the prime minister of Kashmir, 'the scarlet chuprassies wearing white turbans with a scarlet peak in the middle à la blue beard', the elaborate table setting, the food and champagne, Lady Willingdon's dress, and dancing in the ballroom 'finishing up with a mad gallop led by Their Exs'. Viola Bayley, the wife of Vernon Bayley, who was in charge of viceregal security, described the farewell banquet given by the Willingdons for Indian princes as 'an Arabian-night-like scene'.<sup>34</sup> 'I suppose we must have sat several hundred strong with almost as many [*khidmatgars*] in red and gold standing behind our chairs . . . I found myself [placed] giddily high between the Rajah of Faridkhot and a lesser but no less bejewelled noble . . . Jewels flashed in every direction, from diadems in turbans, from ear-rings and necklaces.'

Although such parties were dominated by European guests until Lord Mountbatten's viceroyalty, Indians were increasingly being invited to the Viceroy's House. Besides Indian princes, as services such as the ICS were being Indianised, the westernised Indian elite started to make an appearance. However, the two groups of Indians at such events that are repeatedly evoked in the British accounts included the princes and the servants. No matter that they belonged to the two ends of the spectrum—if the Indian princes clad in brocade and adorned with jewels lent pageantry to viceregal proceedings, the Indian servants were the exotic extras.

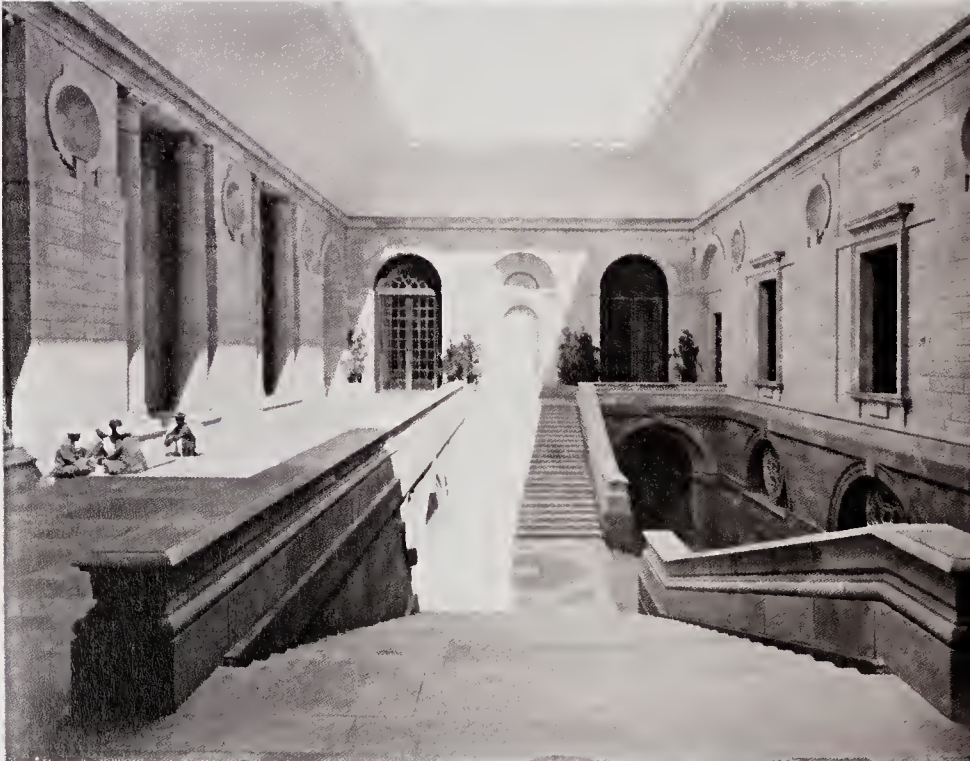
*The solitary figure of the attendant in the vast spaces of the Viceroy's House appears dwarfed against the architectural magnificence (Source: COUNTRY LIFE magazine)*

The extended viceregal staff included about 2000 Indians comprising the clerical staff, the domestic staff, gardeners and groundsmen, stable hands, drivers and mechanics, the soldiers of the GGBG and the infantry guard battalion, and security personnel.<sup>35</sup> Service in the viceregal establishment was highly sophisticated including such distinctions within groups: for example, the so-called table servants included a head *khansama* or steward, butlers, *abdars* who served the drinks, *khidmatgars* or waiters, silvermen and *sickligars* who polished the silver, and *masaldhis* or scullery boys; while the house establishment consisted of a tennis marker, tennis boys (usually very young boys), store coolies, tinmen, *bhisties* or water carriers as well as hot water bearers, tailors, a carpenter and a barber, *tindals* and *lascars* or room attendants, sweepers, and *dihobis* or washermen.<sup>36</sup> There was even a chicken cleaner exclusively devoted to preparing chickens for cooking and a turban-binder. The office assistants included the categories of *jemadars*, *chobdars*, *chaprassis*, *farashes* and *daftaries*.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, the Indian staff was entirely male with the exception of one ayah or maid to repair the linen, while the *tindals* and *lascars* corresponded to housemaids in Britain. It is possibly reflective of the colonial wariness of Indian women. Service in the viceregal (and, subsequently, presidential) establishment has been highly coveted. Pamela Mountbatten noted that it used to run in families, a trend that has continued to date as there are plenty of instances of two to three generations having served on it, often in the same position.<sup>38</sup>

To the British onlooker, the Indian attendants and the bodyguards attired in their ceremonial uniforms added to the grandeur of the viceregal palace. Some descriptions, such as Francis Tudsberry's, fetishised the attendants to almost a disconcerting degree. He fixated on their appearance in their scarlet tunics and white trousers, also drawing attention to their noiseless bare feet, relating them to scenes of oriental splendour from the Arabian Nights.<sup>39</sup> However, few of these onlookers could be bothered with these fabulous Indian figures after the clock struck midnight, and they were divested of their fanciful clothing and returned to their rooms in one corner of the viceregal estate. One of the few that could be bothered (albeit with reference to the next best house of New Delhi, the commander-in-chief's residence), Tom Bird, an ADC to Lord Wavell as the commander-in-chief, painted a sorry picture: 'The Commander-in-Chief's staff of 113 mainly lived in a compound to one side and a little way away from the main house. Each family had a room, in which they cooked and ate and lived. When I visited the compound, which wasn't very often, everyone seemed happy and content, but the contrast of their living conditions with mine was extreme.'<sup>40</sup>







The same basic rules of government accommodation applied to the Viceroy's House as the commander-in-chief's residence, and the Indian staff were housed in single rooms, bigger and smaller based on rank and salary. Furthermore, although the Viceroy's House was state-of-the-art in terms of the comfort and convenience of the British residents, much less thought seems to have gone into the needs of the Indian staff. So much so that certain basic amenities were missing. Soon after the estate became occupied, the Indian staff had to petition the officers to establish so-called 'bania shops' for selling general provisions and groceries in or near the estate.<sup>41</sup> Shops also sprang up arbitrarily in both Schedule A, or the bodyguard lines, and Schedule B. Many of these shops were of dubious authorisation as far as the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) was concerned but, perhaps recognising the Indian community's need for these, were legalised by the authorities of the viceregal establishment. Hawkers were also allowed into the estate as long as they had been cleared by the doctor/surgeon to the viceroy. Hygiene had been the bugbear of the British in India;<sup>42</sup> and, at the viceregal estate, the Indian groups were subject to cleanliness checks.<sup>43</sup> All the cooks were required to wash and scrub their hands and feet with potassium permanganate before entering the viceregal kitchens, a practice which Pat Southby, having briefly acted as comptroller, credited with preventing the outbreak of food poisoning.<sup>44</sup> Potassium permanganate seems to have been the disinfectant of choice as the fruits and vegetables on sale in the main general provisions and groceries store were expected to first be washed with it.<sup>45</sup>

It is difficult to estimate the extent to which the changing political scenario as represented by growing nationalism affected life within the estate. However, some instances reflect the increasing skittishness of the British residents as general provision and groceries stores had to undertake not to close during *hartals* or

strikes, and a scuffle between a few Indian residents was initially deemed a riot.<sup>46</sup> There are also signs of tension between Hindu and Muslim groups as questions were raised in the legislative assembly about the communal composition of the office assistants at the Viceroy's House.<sup>47</sup>

There are few records of a personalised relationship between a British master and an Indian servant that bring out the character of the latter. For example, in describing her relationship with her Indian bearer, Leela Nand, Pamela Mountbatten lets out that he expected to be hit by his mistress as befitting the viceroy's daughter and seems 'affronted' when she refused.<sup>48</sup> In her narrative, Leela Nand ends up sounding a bit like an overgrown child, a good-natured simpleton given to quaint mannerisms and emotional outbursts.<sup>49</sup>

## THE BREAKING DOWN OF RACIAL BARRIERS

'The gardens were illuminated and were infinitely more popular than the ballroom. With the background of Lutyens's fountains, and the lights of Imperial Delhi and the gay uniforms of the men, and the long flowing dresses of the women, and the distant music of the band it seemed as if old Versailles had come to life . . . It is the type of atmosphere that must have pervaded the closing years of the Second Empire. *We enjoy the great gala nights of Viceregal hospitality all the more because we wonder uneasily how much longer they will continue.*'<sup>50</sup> Thus recalled a guest, Robert Bernays, at a farewell ball for the Irwins in 1931.

Having said that, the viceregal set-up from Lord Irwin to Lord Linlithgow largely went about life in the estate as though nothing was changing. Caught up in his proximity to the Linlithgows, Francis Tudsberry dismissed the nationalist movement as 'a revolutionary experiment'.<sup>51</sup> Looking back on his diaries from his short time in India, Tom Bird touchingly reflected: 'I am now dismayed that the diaries scarcely mention the War, the troubles in India, Gandhi, or even the dreadful conditions and ghastly poverty that the great majority of Indians lived in.'<sup>52</sup> It is only during the tenures of the last two viceroys, Lords Wavell and Mountbatten, that the British establishment began to prepare for Independence.

Lord Wavell was upgraded from commander-in-chief to viceroy, the only instance of such a promotion and accepted the position believing that Independence was imminent as soon as the Second World War ended. Overshadowed in the history of the twilight of the Raj by the flashier Lord Mountbatten, it is often forgotten

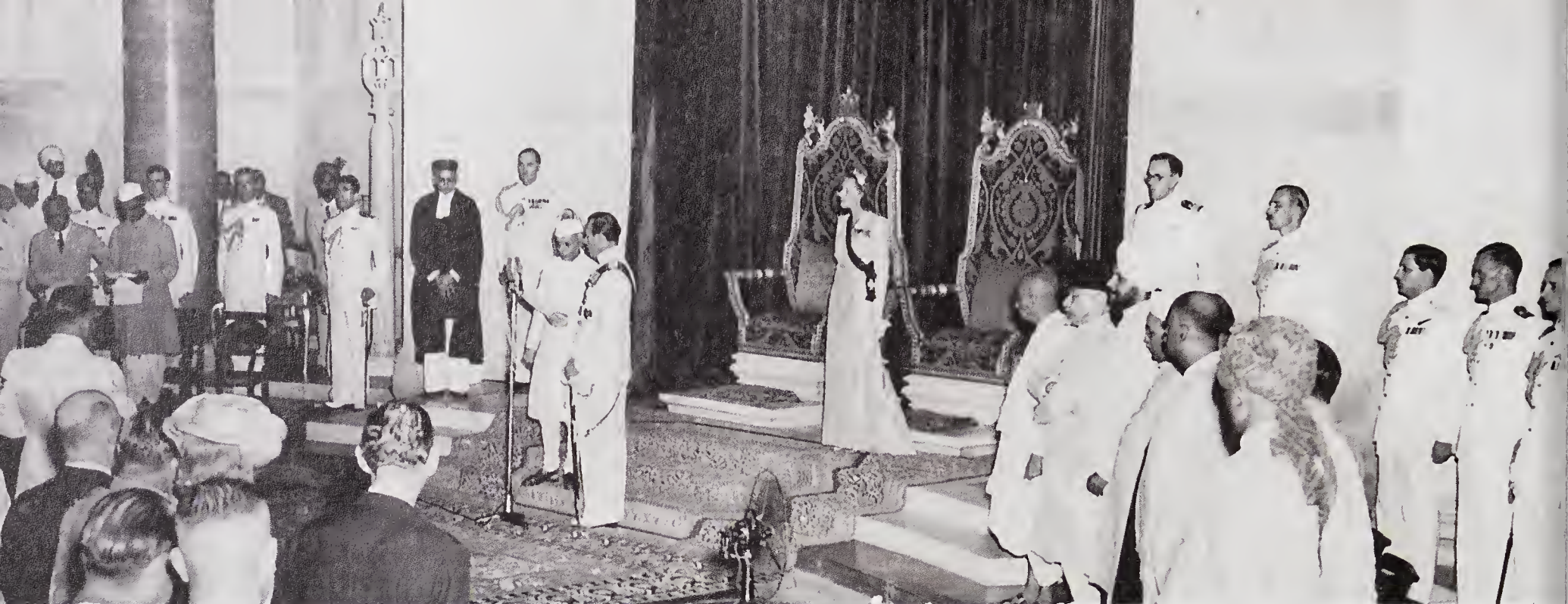
*CLOCKWISE. Lord and Lady Wavell were old India hands as opposed to most viceregal couples, Lord Wavell being promoted to viceroy after serving as the commander-in-chief of the Indian Army. They are photographed here by Sir Cecil Beaton as a part of Beaton's assignment by the British ministry of information to do propaganda photography in the empire in light of the Second World War (Source: Imperial War Museum, UK)*

*Candid moment captured between the viceroy, Lord Wavell (pictured in the centre), and (to his left) Lord Auchinleck, commander-in-chief of the British Indian Army in the Mughal Garden*

*Pictured here is a small group of household staff seated in the inner courtyard that emerges from the open staircase*

*A rare photo of Mohammed Ali Jinnah smiling in the company of the Mountbattens, with whom he ordinarily shared a frosty relationship, at the Viceroy's House*





that Lord Wavell presided over an interesting period of the Raj. The war was raging, Bengal was overrun with famine and negotiations over the future of India with the different shades of the Indian leadership were coming to a head. The horrors of war may not have been felt at the viceregal seats at first. Earlier commentators such as Philip Mason were horrified to note that the viceregal lifestyle under Lord Linlithgow—at whose garden party at the Viceregal Lodge in Simla in 1934, Indian guests were served in the verandah whereas the Europeans were entertained in the house—remained fairly unaffected by it.<sup>53</sup> In Simla, in 1940, Viola Bayley felt that their world ‘could hardly have been further removed from the world of invasions and submarines and life-jackets’.<sup>54</sup> But Lord Linlithgow dismissed the suggestions of the secretary of state for India, Charles Amery, urging the British community in India to take the lead in practising austerity in solidarity with the war effort.<sup>55</sup>

Lord Wavell proved more sensitive (or realistic) than his predecessor as he took stock of the situation in Bengal and curtailed viceregal excesses during wartime. The nine-hole golf course of the viceregal estate was converted into wheat fields towards the war effort Grow More Food campaign, a practice that continued until the end of the 1940s post Independence.<sup>56</sup> The great colonial sport of polo was also abandoned and, after the war, Major Thakur Govind Singh, as commandant of the GGBG, had to have anthills removed from the polo grounds from years of disuse before the game could be played there again.<sup>57</sup> The number of courses at viceregal lunches and dinners were also reduced; although, not the number of guests as Delhi received important wartime visitors, including the Chiang Kai-sheks and Lord Mountbatten, then the Supreme Allied Commander of the South East Asia Command. Delhi, in fact, eventually emerged as a major centre in the Allied operations in Southeast Asia, taking on a cosmopolitan flavour with the influx of American troops, representatives of foreign governments, and war correspondents,

reporters and photographers.<sup>58</sup> One such visitor to be received at the Viceroy’s House was Freya Stark—this British explorer and travel writer cut a romantic figure as she travelled in remote parts of West and South Asia and wrote popular accounts of her travels, a British propagandist in Egypt during the war.<sup>59</sup> Tom Bird, then Lord Wavell’s ADC as commander-in-chief, remembered entertaining her along with Lieutenant Peter Coates, Lord Linlithgow’s ADC.<sup>60</sup>

With the end of the war, negotiations with the nationalist leaders picked up pace and Indian nationalist leaders began to eat meals at the Viceroy’s House.<sup>61</sup> Lord Wavell and his household on their part ensured that such meals were vegetarian. Lord Wavell was not known for his small talk and guests at viceregal entertainments gave accounts of stiff, awkward exchanges with the viceroy.<sup>62</sup> He had to, in fact, come up with the conversation gambit of asking his female dinner companions which animal they would choose to be if they had to be one in a next life!<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the Wavells were well-liked and considered well-meaning as opposed

*ABOVE. The first post-Independence government led by Jawaharlal Nehru is sworn in on 15 August 1947 in the Durbar Hall of Government House in an event conducted by the first governor general, Lord Mountbatten, and Lady Mountbatten. It was one in a series of events in a remarkable day*

*FACING PAGE, ABOVE. Lady Mountbatten is remembered for her genuine interest in India and is seen here interacting with the women at the Governor General’s Bodyguard lines (Source: PBG Albums)*

*FACING PAGE, BELOW. Until 1947, the officers at the Viceroy’s House were invariably European even though the Indian Civil Services and the Indian Army were being Indianised. In this rare photo, the transition from a European staff to an Indian one is seen as Mountbatten’s staff as governor general started to include such officers as Major Thakur Govind Singh (the first Indian commandant of the GGBG) and Ashok Raje Gackwar who served as one of ADCs to the governor general. The junior commissioned officers, seen here at the back, were Indian all along (Source: Sneha Govind Singh)*







to the supercilious Linlithgows.<sup>64</sup> Lord Wavell paved the way for deeper engagement with the nationalist leaders and recognised the urgency of Indian aspirations. The Wavells also took an interest in the lot of the Indian residents of the viceregal estate. In 1946, Lady Wavell inaugurated a clinic for the soldiers of the GGBG and their families. She also established a school for the children of the Indian subordinate staff in the same year,<sup>65</sup> and her daughter Felicity would help out with it.<sup>66</sup> Fittingly, the last two viceregal families were best poised to deliver India to Indian hands.

The end of the war resulted in a change in government from a Conservative to a Labour one, replacing Churchill with Clement Attlee as prime minister in Britain. The Labour government decided that the new viceroy was required to break new ground in the negotiations with the Indian leaders as the Muslim League demanded a separate nation for the Indian Muslims. Lord Mountbatten was that man—combining the requisite liberal values to be sympathetic to Indian aspirations with impeccable royal credentials as the second cousin of King George VI. It is not possible to speak of Lord Mountbatten's viceroyalty without mentioning the remarkable Lady Edwina Mountbatten, who took to India and Indians in a more meaningful way than any other vicereine. Lord Mountbatten was sworn in in the Durbar Hall flanked by such Indian leaders as Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan, and announced at this occasion itself that India would be granted Independence no later than June 1948. He was the next viceroy to have Gandhi at the Viceroy's House after Lord Irwin, drinking tea as Gandhi ate goat's milk curd. Although the outraged sentiments of Churchill were missing after a decade and a half, racist feelings lingered as the British press denounced the sight of Gandhi's hand resting on the vicereine's shoulder when he took her support as he walked into the Viceroy's House.<sup>67</sup> Leaders such as Nehru, Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali would also visit the viceregal couple in their residence. Nehru, of course, became a great friend of the Mountbattens and a frequent visitor. Jinnah proved trickier. He would scoff at viceregal protocol as he would turn up late for the Mountbattens' dinner parties and leave with them (rather than after them).<sup>68</sup>

Lord Mountbatten's handling of the situation leading up to Independence and Partition is still debated. However, he did *broadly* manage to achieve the main goals of his viceroyalty: to quickly transfer power, in spite of the bitter price of Partition; to end the British Empire in India on a good note; and to retain India within the Commonwealth (although nothing came of his frantic efforts to convince the leadership of India and Pakistan to include the Union Jack in a corner of the new national flags).<sup>69</sup> All of these goals required a lot of entertaining at the Viceroy's House, different from previous viceregal entertainments in the sheer number of Indian guests, not just the princely and the professional elites, but also nationalist leaders. Lord Mountbatten stipulated that half the guests at any viceregal function would

be Indian and, appalled to learn about a racist comment by one of his British guests, decided that anyone making such a remark would be asked to leave.<sup>70</sup> He had set out on his self-designated 'Operation Seduction' of Indians.<sup>71</sup>

Lady Mountbatten, meanwhile, got involved with the running of the house and, moreover, the estate. She was the first vicereine to inspect the Indian assistants' quarters and tour the bodyguard lines with a view to improving the living conditions of the Indian residents of the estate.<sup>72</sup> The same energetic commitment to welfare activities would be on display as she came into her own during the communal violence associated with Partition as she visited refugee camps and hospitals in Delhi and Punjab, doing her best to help with provisions, comfort and console. In all these activities, her companions were educated progressive Indians such as Nehru and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. Young Pamela Mountbatten did her bit by meeting Indian students and making friends with young Indians, helping out at clinics and dispensaries, and assisting the emergency military staff at Government House during Partition.<sup>73</sup>

## THE BIRTHPLACE FOR MODERN SOUTH ASIA

In late May and early June 1947, the Viceroy's House became the setting for the establishment of modern South Asian nations, the dominions of India and Pakistan. On 2 June, in the viceroy's study overlooking the Mughal Garden, Lord Mountbatten met with Nehru, Jinnah, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Liaquat Ali Khan, J.B. Kripalani, Sardar Baldev Singh and Abdul Rab Nishtar. He announced that the plan to grant India independence and partition it was approved by the British cabinet. The next day, following the approval of the larger parties or groups the leaders represented, Lord Mountbatten disclosed the plan in the first press conference given by him as a viceroy and hinted at a date, 15 August, to the world at large. The countdown to Independence, as illustrated by Lord Mountbatten's special calendars marking the number of days to it, had begun.

On 15 August, the Viceroy's House was renamed Government House after India's first prime minister, Nehru, had declared the nation free at midnight. Even today it is hard not to feel affected by the euphoria described in the accounts of the first Independence Day celebrations. The starting point in these celebrations was Government House. In the morning, Lord Mountbatten was sworn in as the first governor general of independent India and

*Nehru gives Pamela Mountbatten a warm send-off as the Mountbattens leave India*







the Indian national anthem, *Jana Gana Mana*, resonated for the first time in the Durbar Hall. Then he, Lady Mountbatten and Pamela Mountbatten left in the state carriage escorted by the GGBG for the legislative assembly and later the War Memorial Arch (now India Gate) for ceremonies at which the Indian tricolour was hoisted. The day culminated with an evening reception for 3000 guests in a lit-up Mughal Garden. The only group that would perhaps look back on this day and shudder would be the GGBG as they supplied mounted and dismounted escorts throughout the day even though half of the unit, the Punjabi Muslims, along with the adjutant, Major Sahibzada Mohammad Yakub Khan, had recently departed to form the bodyguard unit of the governor general of Pakistan. It was a miracle that only two horses fell and no harm came to them or their riders as the GGBG escorted the carriage through the milling crowds. The procession with the carriage at the centre of it finally returned to Government House, 'with Pandit Nehru sitting on the hood and a number of Indian ladies and children in and on it whom Their Excellencies had saved from being trampled on by the crowd. Their Excellencies were extraordinarily patient with the crowd whose exuberance the escort was not in any way permitted to curb. . . The day ended for the Bodyguard at 11.30 p.m.'<sup>74</sup>

The consolidation of Independence came with the rupture of Partition. However, in the build-up to Partition, the Sikh and Muslim troops of the GGBG had looked out for each other and, on Partition, parted on the best of terms.<sup>75</sup> The current regimental tailor with the President's Bodyguard (PBG), Mohammad Qamar Idris, is the third generation to serve in the position after his grandfather, Mohammad Hussain, was persuaded by the then commandant of the GGBG, Major P. Massey, to stay on with the unit in Delhi.<sup>76</sup> On one hand, Lord Mountbatten generously encouraged Major Sahibzada Mohammad Yakub Khan and the ADC Lieutenant Sayed Ahsan to leave for Pakistan to help Jinnah set up the governor general's house in Pakistan.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, he was concerned about the fate of the Muslim servants at Government House. He decided that those who did not have family ties in Pakistan were better served continuing to work and live in the estate and left a member of his staff after his departure from India to watch over their welfare in these times of communal tension.<sup>78</sup> As is discussed in subsequent chapters, a feeling of family across religious lines continues to be felt among the permanent residents of the President's Estate.

Nonetheless, even the sheltered world of the estate could not escape being affected by the upheaval of Partition. At the height of it, tension was rife as a stabbing on the estate was reported.<sup>79</sup> About 5000 refugees were taken in, and a rationing centre was set up to feed them and the many residents of the estate.<sup>80</sup> In the face of food shortage, Lady Mountbatten imposed austerity on Government House, and its dwellers and guests ate a frugal

diet of Spam, bully beef and potato.<sup>81</sup> Having observed the Mountbattens at close quarters, his ADC Narendra Singh Sarila noted that Lord Mountbatten 'totally lacked in lordliness or racism' and his wife 'was a rare combination of English tact and deftness and un-English nonconformity'.<sup>82</sup> It is testimony to the warmth and openness with which they engaged with India that, on 21 June 1948, the last of the British *laad sahibs* was seen off in the forecourt of Government House by the Indian staff and local crowds in a display of goodwill. Indeed, the only viceregal portraits from the collection of the Rashtrapati Bhavan to still hang in its hallways is that of Lord and Lady Mountbatten, the rest relegated to museums as relics of another time and age.

## NOTES

1 This photo is one in a collection of private photos of the private life of the Linlithgow family and their inner circle at the Viceroy's House, a set of which is housed in the British Library. Unfortunately, it was not possible to reproduce any of these rare photos as the copyright in them could not be traced. 'Life in the Viceroy's House', Papers (including prints) of Lt. Cdr. Pat Southby, R.N., ADC, India Office Records (IOR), Mss. Eur. T212, British Library (BL).

2 Andrew Roberts, *The Holy Fox: A Life of Lord Halifax* (London: PAPERMAC, 1992), 24. Emphasis mine.

3 Indian domestic workers are largely described as 'servants' in this chapter since that is how they were referred to and thought of as in colonial accounts, including official correspondence. Indeed, even the few European domestic workers in India were referred to as servants.

4 Mark Bence-Jones, *The Viceroys of India* (London: Constable, 1982), 258.

There is a similar later reference from the viceroyalty of Lord Mountbatten to the effect of Gandhi's visit to the Viceroy's House as 'the servants fell to the floor in ecstatic obeisance'; see Pamela Hicks, *Daughter of Empire: Life as a Mountbatten* (London: Phoenix), 117.

5 Numerous suggestions were made by both Indian politicians as well as some officers of the ICS to appoint an Indian to the post of private secretary or a post of assistant private secretary to the viceroy from the late 1920s. For example, Question of Appointment of an Indian as the PSV or APSV, Home Department, Public Branch, Progs 400, 1926, National Archives of India (NAI) and Question of Appointing an Indian as APSV (dropped), Establishment Branch, File No. 68-Admin (43), 1943, Rashtrapati Bhavan Records Room.

*The Viceroy's House was reinvented as the Rashtrapati Bhavan at the heart of the new Indian republic, 1951. It is fitting that the some of the earliest iconic photos of the Rashtrapati Bhavan such as this photo of it lit up were taken by Homai Vyarawalla, the first woman photo-journalist to work for the Public Information Bureau (Source: Alkazi Collection of Photography, New Delhi)*







6 Life in the Viceroy's House, Talk by Lt. Cdr. Pat Southby, R.N., ADC, Part I, 2 Parts, India Office Records (IOR), Mss. Eur. T212, BL, 2.

7 Ibid.

8 Appointment to the Viceroy's House, Mss. Eur. Neg. 15557/12, BL, 13.

9 Letter from the outgoing viceroy, Lord Reading, to Lord Irwin dated 18 November 1925, Mss. Eur. F 138/36, BL; Southby, Part II, 7.

10 Southby, Part II, 1.

11 Duties of the Viceroy's Staff, Mss. Eur. Neg. 15557/12, BL, 19.

12 Southby, Part II, 2.

13 Francis Tudsberry, Journey to India, Viceroy's House & Tour of India, Mss. Eur. F679, BL, 139.

14 Bence-Jones, *The Viceroy's of India*, 245.

15 Like the photo described of Doreen at the start of this chapter (n. 1), there is another photo from the same collection of Joan driving a barouche, the ADC Geoffrey Keeley sitting alongside her in the passenger seat, taking a spin around the viceregal estate. They are attended by an Indian syce.

16 Tudsberry, Journey to India, 85.

17 Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 154.

18 Nayantara Pothan, *Glittering Decades: New Delhi in Love and War* (Viking: New Delhi, 2012), 48–49; Lizzie Collingham with Salma Husain, *Around India's First Table: Dining and Entertaining at the Rashtrapati Bhavan*, RB Series (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2016).

19 Southby, Part I, 6.

20 Southby, Part I, 5.

21 Tudsberry, Journey to India, 78a.

22 Ibid., 102–03.

23 Place-names spelled as they then were.

24 Telegram from the viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, to Neville Chamberlain on 2 October 1940, Linlithgow Papers, Mss. Eur. F125, BL.

25 Ibid.

26 Major Meysey George Dallas Clive, Compiled Notebook, Mss. Eur. F466, BL, 43.

27 As an inside joke, the irrepressible Lutyens gifted Lady Linlithgow a

trophy cup inscribed with the words: 'To her Excellency The Marchioness of Linlithgow whose Presence dignifies and whose Sovereign Touch represents the Wounds inflicted by Mistaken Zeal upon The Viceroy's House at Delhi [by Lady Willingdon]. This Goblet is humbly offered as a token of Gratitude by him who has Most Reason to be Grateful [Lutyens].' Papers and prints of Southby.

28 Ibid, 20. For more on the mural decoration of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, see Partha Mitter, 'The Murals of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the Secretariat Block, New Delhi', in *The Arts and Interiors of Rashtrapati Bhavan*, eds Partha Mitter and Naman P. Ahuja (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2016) 144–45.

29 Bence-Jones, *The Viceroy's of India*, 271.

30 Alex von Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 178.

31 Yvonne FitzRoy, Diary, Mss. Eur. E 312/9(b), BL.

32 Iris Portal, interviewed by Charles Allen, 1972–74, Mss. Eur. R53/1–7, IOR Oral Archives, BL.

33 Letter written by Mary Muriel McKnight on 28 November 1931, McKnight Papers, Small Collections, Box No. 16, Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge University (CSAS).

34 Viola Bayley, Bayley (V) Papers, Small Collection Box 2, Microfilm (No. 57), CSAS, 26.

35 Narendra Singh Sarila *Once a Prince of Sarila: Of Palaces and Elephant Rides*, (London: I B Tauris, 2008), 235.

36 Notes regarding the Office of the Comptroller's Department, details regarding the Viceroy's House, New Delhi, IOR/L/PO/11/9, BL.

37 Ibid.

38 Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 113; Rana T.S. Chhina and Yashaswini Chandra, eds., *Right of the Line: The President's Bodyguard*, RB Series (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2015), 109.

39 Tudsberry, Journey to India, 87–97.

40 Tom Bird, *Letters Home (1939–1946)*, privately published, 64.

41 Bania Stores in Viceregal Estates, New Delhi, 35–48, Buildings and Roads Branch, Office of the Military Secretary to the Viceroy, 1935, Rashtrapati Bhavan Records Room.

42 For an overview of the colonial discourse on health and sanitation in India, see Yashaswini Chandra, 'The Colonial Backdrop to the Western Himalaya', in *The Presidential Retreats of India*, ed. Gillian Wright (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2015), 54–57.



- 43 Southby, Part I, 6.
- 44 Southby, Part I, 8.
- 45 Correspondence regarding Agreements Viceroy's Estate Market and Shopkeepers, 163/45, Accounts Branch, Military Secretary to the Viceroy's Office, 1945, Rashtrapati Bhavan Records Room.
- 46 Letter from the military secretary to the private secretary to the viceroy dated 24 April 1945, Bania Stores in Viceregal Estates, New Delhi, 35–48, Buildings and Roads Branch, Office of the Military Secretary to the Viceroy, 1935, Rashtrapati Bhavan Records Room.
- 47 Question for the Legislative Assembly by Mr Mohammed Nauman, and Question in the Legislative Assembly about the Number of the Communal Composition of the Inferior Staff, 11-Adm/41, Establishment Branch, Private Secretary to the Viceroy's Office, 1941, Rashtrapati Bhavan Records Room.
- 48 Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 114.
- It was not unknown for British memsahibs to beat their servants when displeased at least in the 19th century, see Nupur Chaudhuri, 'Memsahibs and their Servants in Nineteenth-Century India', *Women's History Review* 3, 4 (1994), 555–56.
- 49 Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 114; Pamela Mountbatten, *India Remembered: A Personal Account of the Mountbattens during the Transfer of Power* (London: Pavilion Books, 2007), 52.
- 50 As quoted in Roberts, *The Holy Fox*, 43. Emphasis mine.
- 51 Tudsberry, *Journey to India*, 137.
- 52 Bird, *Letters Back Home*, 88.
- 53 Pothen, *Glittering Decades*, 156.
- 54 Bayley, Microfilm (No. 57), 59; also see Chandra, 'The Colonial Backdrop to the Western Himalaya', 74.
- 55 Pothen, *Glittering Decades*, 67–68.
- 56 Ibid., 73.
- 57 Interview with Sneh Govind Singh and Indervijai Singh (Jaipur: 13 April 2016). Sneh Govind Singh and Indervijai Singh were the wife and son of the late Govind Singh, who commanded the GGBG from 1947 to 1950.
- 58 Pothen, *Glittering Decades*, 64–77.
- 59 Stark is indeed described as a 'passionate nomad' in her biography, see: Jane Fletcher Geniesse, *Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark* (Modern Library Paperbacks, 2001).
- 60 Bird, *Letters Back Home*, 45.
- 61 Ibid., 36.
- 62 Taya Zinkin, *French Mensahib* (London: Thomas Hamsworth Publishers, 1989), 76.
- 63 Bence-Jones, *The Viceroy's of India*, 293.
- 64 Pothen, *The Glittering Decades*, 115.
- 65 Viceregal Estate Primary School, New Delhi, File F 72–75, Education Department, 1947, NAI.
- 66 Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 110.
- 67 Ibid., 118.
- 68 Shahid Hamid, *Disastrous Twilight: A Personal Record of the Partition of India* (London: Leo Cooper in association with Secker & Warburg, 1986), 206.
- 69 Flags, Mountbatten Papers, File No. 161 A, BL.
- 70 Extract from the Viceroy's 6th Staff Meeting held on Saturday, 29 March 1947, and Extract from the Viceroy's 12th Staff Meeting held on Thursday, 10 April 1947, Mountbatten Papers, File 170, BL; Hicks, *Daughter of the Empire*, 121.
- Mountbatten also refused to extend patronage to clubs that excluded Indians, see: Extract from the Viceroy's 8th Staff Meeting held on Friday, 4 April 1947', Mountbatten Papers, File 170, BL.
- 71 Hicks, *India Remembered*, 38.
- 72 Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 82.
- 73 Ibid., 101.
- 74 Digest of Service, PBG records; Rana T.S. Chhina, 'In the Service of the President', in *Right of the Line*, 87, 89.
- 75 Rana T.S. Chhina, 'In the Service of the Governor-General', in *Right of the Line*, 70–71.
- 76 Chhina and Chandra, eds., *Right of the Line*, 109.
- 77 Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 169.
- 78 Notes on a Staff Meeting held at 12 Noon on Thursday, 11 December, Mountbatten Papers, File 170, BL.
- 79 Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 172.
- 80 Ibid, 181.
- 81 Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 186; Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer*, 205.
- 82 Sarila, *Once a Prince of Sarila*, 286–87.



## THE VICEROY'S HOUSE AS A SETTING

There exists a considerable corpus of literature on mostly the main building of the Rashtrapati Bhavan (originally the Viceroy's House), often in the context of New Delhi, including three separate volumes from this series dedicated to its architecture, grounds and gardens, and interiors.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, both the main building and the surrounding estate are worth examining from the point of view of the lifestyle it was originally intended for.

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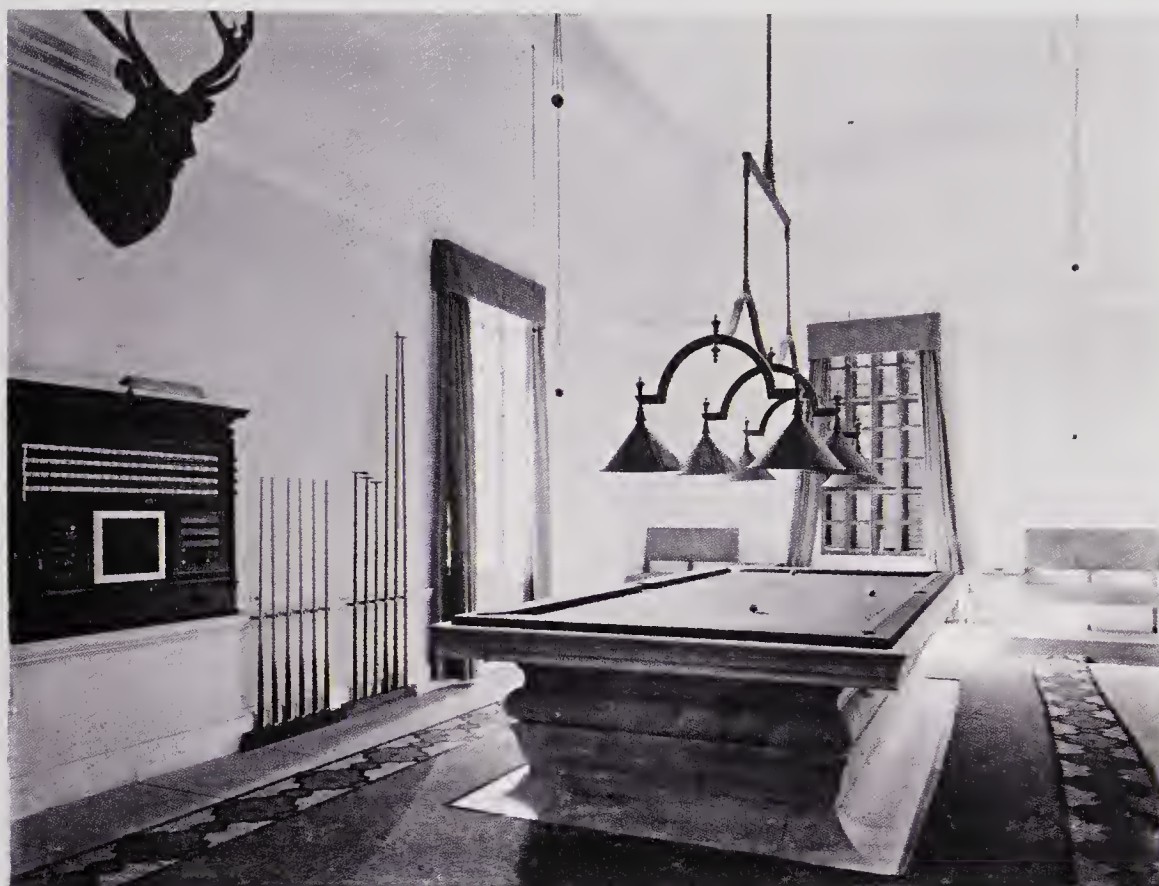
The geography of the President's Estate is stamped with the history of Delhi. In the 18th century, the Mughal overlord Shah Alam II gifted Raisina Hill to the maharaja of Marwar, Bakht Singh.<sup>2</sup> However, until the colonial state identified it as the nucleus of the new capital in 1912, it was an obscure little hill scattered with rocks and scrubs inhabited by a few Gujjar shepherds. But it had romantic potential—a prospect of the 'Old Fort' (Purana Qila), linking the Mughal history of the city with the latest colonial period. The sole remnants from this time are little dargahs that have become sacred sites in the cosmology of the estate. In 1912, Raisina Hill was identified by the viceroy, Lord Hardinge, and the Delhi Town Planning Committee, consisting of the chief commissioner of Delhi, Malcolm Hailey, and the chief architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens, as the 'tabula rasa' on which the viceregal estate could be built from scratch. A tremendous exercise followed to clear, level, build on and plant trees. By the time of its inauguration in 1931, the arid landscape had been transformed into a palatial estate, at the heart of which was an English stately home for India.

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The Viceroy's House appears to have combined an Edwardian English stately, even a country, house with a palatial Raj dwelling. Lutyens had built his reputation as the architect of English country houses for a changing order, old aristocrats but also the new, but nostalgic, rich. 'Anyone who wanted to build himself a country house that would be new but not too new, orderly but not overbearing, gratifyingly inventive and yet reassuring traditional could, and very often did, go to Lutyens.'<sup>3</sup> Seen in this light, the oft-debated integration of Indian elements in the design of the Viceroy's House is not that surprising, all the more so when combined with the official pressure on Lutyens in this regard.<sup>4</sup> The Viceroy's House was intended to accommodate the public and official considerations of a Government House as well as the private needs of a British aristocratic family, as viceregal families tended to be. Arguably, it was the only home to combine an office in New Delhi. Private and public spaces were not perfectly segregated into separate sections, with the exception of the family rooms on the first floor. The sense of stateliness was apparent at the outset—in the approach to the house, a grand flight of stairs sweeps up to the colonnaded front portico and two parallel carriageways (tunnels paved with wood) connect the two stoned-paved courts. Both of the North and South Courts have a stone fountain in the centre, featuring a pair of stone shells in one and bronze snakes in the other. Public reception areas included the staterooms: certain drawing rooms, the dining room or the banquet hall and the ballroom. At the centre of this network of staterooms was a magnificent Durbar Hall, a quintessential feature of traditional Indian kingship incorporated in the nomenclature of the Raj where the ruler gave audience to his courtiers. Otherwise, the house included such staple rooms of the English country house as numerous drawing rooms and sitting rooms as well as a separate library and rooms for billiards and cards. Furthermore, these rooms were appointed along the lines of, in the words of Lutyens himself, a 'gentleman's house'.<sup>5</sup>

The numerous large windows and loggias inside the house reflect the Edwardian penchant for naturally lit and ventilated rooms integrating the outdoors with the indoors. However, for all its old-world romanticism, modern comforts were integral





to (if not overt in) such country house architecture.<sup>6</sup> Lutyens had made a reputation in that regard as he conceived such smart residences as Gledstone Hall in Yorkshire and Middleton Park in Oxfordshire. Such luxurious elements still stand out at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as the lifts in the south wing (originally the family wing) panelled with glass and rich crimson velvet and the main bathroom (intended for the viceroy) in the same wing. 'In bathrooms, especially, country-house architects tended to let themselves go, and indulge in often expensive fantasies in glass, marble, metal or mosaic'<sup>7</sup>—and so Lutyens let himself go as he designed a bathroom with an elaborate metal frame for the shower, expansive marble wash-basin counters and walls panelled with wood fitted with glass. Life in the Viceroy's House was made convenient through the installation of 300 telephones, and extensive electrical, water-supply and sanitation installations.<sup>8</sup> Modern conveniences extended to the basement as it included an electrically-equipped kitchen, refrigerating and ice-making rooms and a boiler room.<sup>9</sup> However, until the modern innovation of air-conditioning was installed in the house, for all of Lutyens' planning, the house failed on one account.<sup>10</sup> The different wings seem to have been uncomfortable in different seasons and the viceregal families seem to have shuttled between them, abandoning the original family wing and moving into the south one in the early years.<sup>11</sup> Nothing, it seems, could prepare the builder of Edwardian country houses for the Indian summer.

The comparison with the Edwardian country house also falters on an important score. In its case, the increase in modern technology corresponded with lesser servants, whereas, in the case of the Viceroy's House, there was no dearth of technology—or Indian servants. Masses of them serviced the viceregal establishment, becoming co-residents of the viceregal estate alongside the British residents in the main building and secluded bungalows known as the European staff quarters. Although the Edwardian upper classes were less uncomfortable with the presence of their servants than their Victorian counterparts, masters and servants were still expected to maintain distance, added to which were the racist sentiments of the Raj. The Edwardian

*The billiards room was just one of the rooms custom-made for upper-class living in the Viceroy's House. Indeed, Lutyens himself declared it a 'gentlemen's house'. An ADC used to be in charge of maintaining the bridge and billiards accounts (Source: COUNTRY LIFE magazine)*



country house would accommodate the domestic staff in separate housing within reachable distance of the main house rather than the basement of the Victorian period.<sup>12</sup> This tendency would have been that much more accentuated in the case of the Viceroy's House, given the sheer number of servants and that they were almost all Indians. Most of them were tucked into housing known as Indian assistants' quarters in the corners of the estate, separated from the main house by acres of gardens, parks and the golf course. These quarters consisted of single-roomed tenements laid out on sunken ground and clustered within a high circular wall to ensure that their Indian inhabitants and their *mohalla* lifestyle were kept out of sight. Here, presumably, the families could sit out in the central courtyard, the children could play games, clothes could be hung out to dry, chickens could run about and goats could be tethered. Thus, parallel British and Indian lives could be lived out within the same wider compound, intersecting occasionally but largely cut off from each other.

The right side of the estate also included the matching buildings of the viceregal stables and motor garages. The estate afforded plenty of opportunity for indoor and outdoor sports for the British inhabitants from billiards, squash and swimming, to tennis, riding, cricket, golf and even hunting in the nearby ridge forest. In short, the Viceroy's House was a model residence. It was custom-built for private life in the English country house tradition and public life in the Raj, as well as the enormous staff that sustained both these identities. No wonder that it appeared different things to different persons: 'Just exactly like your wildest flight of imagination for an Indian palace' to Margaret Bruce Dundas Lewis, the wife of a British officer, and 'a country house rather than an immense palace' to the princely Indian aide-de-camp (ADC) to Lord Mountbatten, Narendra Singh Sarila.<sup>13</sup>

#### NOTES

1 Narayani Gupta, ed., *Work of Beauty: Landscape and Architecture of the Rashtrapati Bhavan*, RB Series (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2016); Baviskar, ed., *First Garden of the Republic*, RB Series (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2016); Mitter and Ahuja, eds., *The Arts and Interiors of Rashtrapati Bhavan*.

2 Pandit Bisheshwar Nath Reu, 'An Old Imperial "Sanad" related to Raisina or New Delhi', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Part III (July 1931).

3 Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (London: Book Club Associates, 1979), 306.

4 Partha Mitter, 'The Battle of Styles in New Delhi: The Politics of the Background', in *The Arts and Interiors of Rashtrapati Bhavan*, 20–27.

5 Laura Ongaro, 'The Furniture of the Ultimate Stately Home', in *The Arts and Interiors of Rashtrapati Bhavan*, 241.

6 Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, 308, 314.

7 Ibid., 314.

8 'Sight-Seeing Trip Round 'Lutyens' City', *The Statesman*, 8 February 1931, 2.

9 Ibid., 3.

10 Ibid., 4.

11 Southby, Part I, 4; Hicks, *Daughter of Empire*, 115.

12 Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, 309.

13 Letter from Margaret Bruce Dundas Lewis to Laura Louise Gilpin-Brown from 16 Akbar Road, New Delhi dated 2 January 1930, Mss. Eur. F655/7, BL; Sarila, *Once a Prince of Sarila*, 207.





*Lutyens' style combined all the trapping associated with the aristocratic past and the convenience of modern living. Seen here is the exposed plumbing in the viceregal bathroom, with fittings from the 1920s*









*Spring at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Mughal Garden*





## CHAPTER 3

# A HOME FOR INDIA



Yashaswini Chandra

**B**efore Independence, the freedom fighter Jawaharlal Nehru described the Viceroy's House as a 'visible symbol of British power, with all of its pomp and circumstance, and vulgar ostentation and wasteful extravagance'.<sup>1</sup> After Independence, as the first prime minister of India, the same Nehru would defend its use as the premier home of the nation when the Gandhian Sushila Nayar expressed her displeasure with the idea. 'What you have written about Government House, etc. is something to which we have given considerable thought. We do not want any pomp and splendour but a State has to keep up certain dignity as a State.'<sup>2</sup> The Indian freedom fighters who had resented the Viceroy's House as the epitome of British colonial rule in India would, as Indian leaders, not just have to inhabit and visit it, but own it as representative of Indian democracy. The reorientation in Nehru's opinion testifies to the extent to which the house had to be reimagined as the seat of the head of the sovereign nation of India.

The transformation at the Rashtrapati Bhavan (including the President's Estate) in the post-Independence period is examined here in terms of three linked topics. The first relates to the changes intended to remake the main building from a colonial institution to an Indian home. The second is the intersection between private and public lives in the President's Estate in general, but especially in connection with the president and his/her immediate followers. The third is the balance which has to be achieved between the temporary residents of the estate whose time there is based on fixed-tenure terms beginning with the president and his/her family and senior officials and the permanent dwellers of the estate whose residence is based on permanent jobs, which were often passed down within families.

## REIMAGINING THE VICEREGAL SEAT

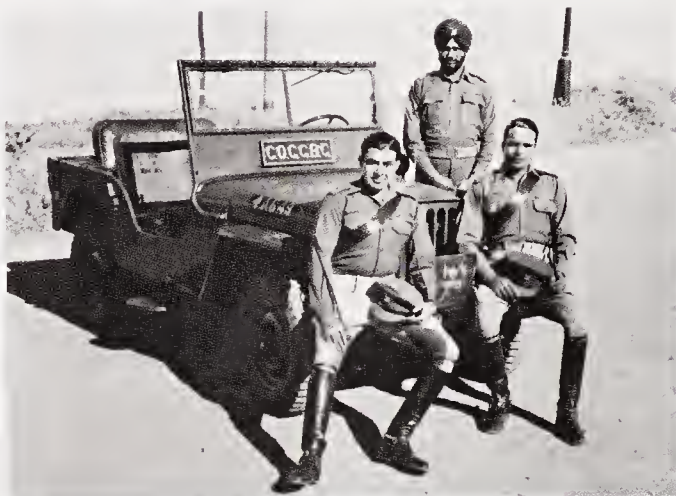
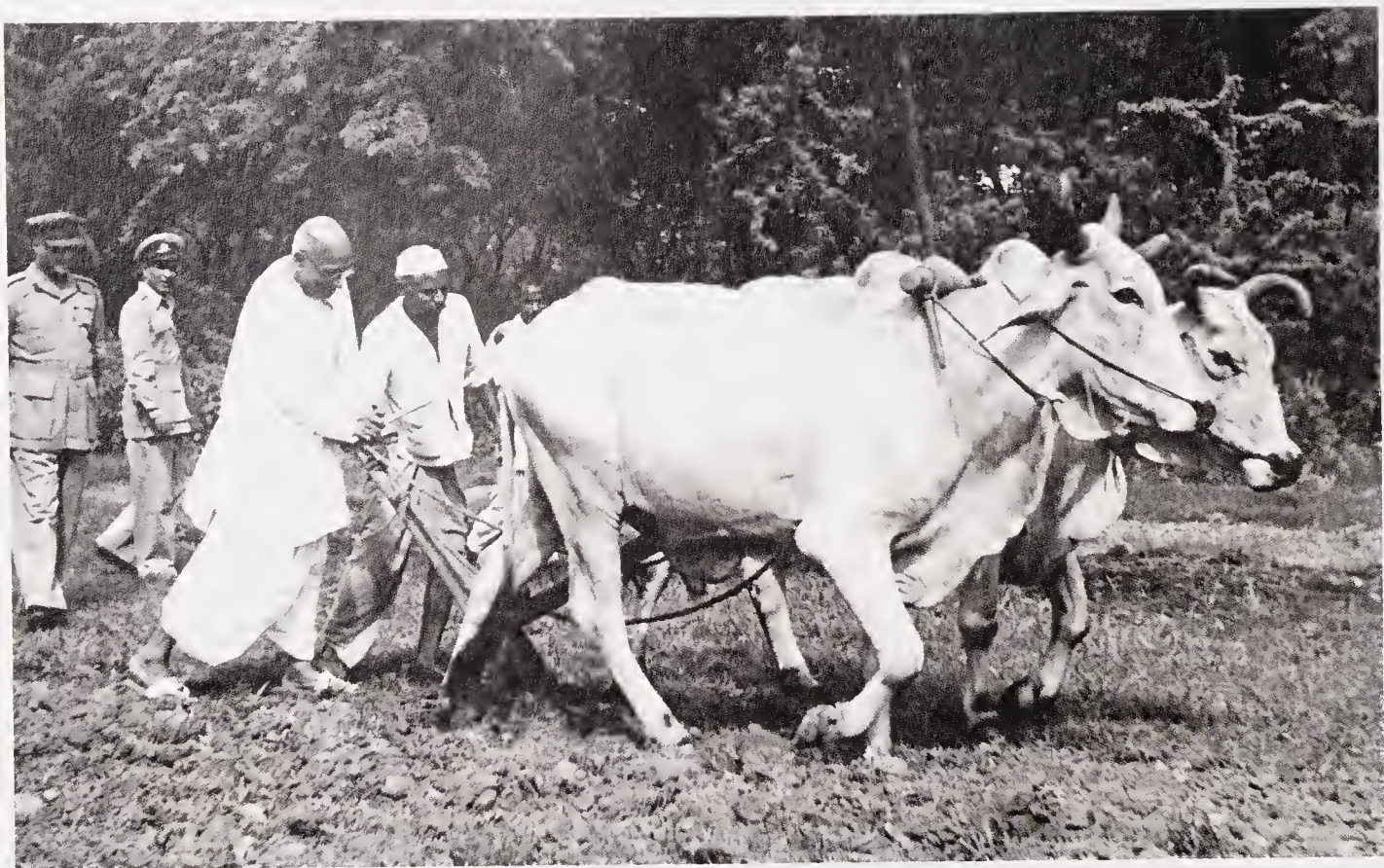
The first, also the last, two governor generals of India, Lord Mountbatten and C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji), were poles apart. If Lord Mountbatten's enthusiasms included polo, genealogy (preferably concerned with the European royalty into which he could firmly locate himself) and decorations,<sup>3</sup> Rajaji's rested on Sanskrit, pacifism and prohibition. Although Lord Mountbatten was the first governor general of independent India, and began the process of the Indianisation of the establishment by bringing in Indian aide-de-camps (ADCs) and other Indian officers, he was not uncomfortable with the palatial residence. He had prevailed on Mahatma Gandhi to retain the house as the home of the Indian head of state when Gandhi had wondered about an alternative use for it,

*The first and only Indian governor general, C. Rajagopalachari, presents the first Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, with a silver plate on the eve of the second Independence Day, 1949, the two 'aglow' in the early light of Independence (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*











such as converting it into a hospital.<sup>4</sup> However, the future of the house was far from resolved in the early days of Independence. The governor general elect, Rajaji, agreed to the proposal to accommodate the cabinet secretariat, part of the foreign office, the prime minister's secretariat, and spaces for conferences and functions within Government House as part of the plan to make the most of the large building, but expressed reservations about living alongside these offices with his large family in the same building.<sup>5</sup> He might have been brought around to occupying Government House but astounded the officers escorting him on a recce, including the commandant of the Governor General's (GGBG), Major Thakur Govind Singh, when he declared that a small room previously used by Lady Mountbatten's lady's maid would do for him.<sup>6</sup> Later, the first president, Rajendra Prasad, on being elected would suggest to Nehru that a bungalow spacious enough for his large family would suffice and Government House could be put 'to some better use'.<sup>7</sup> Three decades later, the sixth president, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, echoed the wariness of earlier leaders at the prospect of living in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. In fact, his choice of words in this regard almost exactly recall Nehru's initial description of Imperial Delhi: 'I stressed the need to avoid vulgar ostentation and unnecessary pomp. I said I decided "to move out of Rashtrapati Bhavan into a simpler house which will not be inconsistent with, or detract from, the dignity of the high office of the President of India."' <sup>8</sup> Hyderabad House and the Willingdon (now Mother Teresa) Crescent bungalows were considered as alternatives but ultimately found unsuitable as presidential housing.<sup>9</sup> President Reddy consoled himself with the knowledge that the presidential family used no more than six rooms in what became the family wing of the Rashtrapati Bhavan (in the south wing).<sup>10</sup>

Of all the other offices, only the cabinet secretariat remains located within the Rashtrapati Bhavan as the role and requirements of the president and prime minister became established and expanded in the decades following Independence. This was not the case during the transition period when Government House was at the centre of discussions pertaining to the future of a republic in the making.<sup>11</sup> National leaders such as Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, B.R. Ambedkar and Sarojini Naidu were frequent visitors, and the governor general was often the mediator in debates between the leaders, as one of his ADCs, Kirpal Singh, recalls.<sup>12</sup> The governor general's residence and that of the prime minister in Teen Murti Bhavan shared a close relationship, both sites for official entertaining and sharing a household staff,<sup>13</sup> and Nehru even had his own room in Government House.<sup>14</sup> After the hugely hierarchy and prestige conscious *laad sahibs* of the colonial period, the first Indian head of state was refreshingly approachable. Rajaji eschewed elaborate security, and travelled on state visits piloted by a solitary motorcyclist and protected by a single armed bodyguard.<sup>15</sup> Film screenings for the viceregal family, guests and the officer class were replaced by the governor general with screenings that were open to all the residents of the estate.<sup>16</sup> This tradition of inclusive film screenings, fondly remembered by generations of former and present residents, continued until about the 1980s.<sup>17</sup> Until President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam built a separate auditorium complex in the President's Estate, a theatre in the basement was used for this purpose.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the earliest Indian leaders were deeply concerned with humanising the stately houses of India. Nehru, for example, suggested that tea and biscuits should be served to the chauffeurs bringing guests to Government House, as well as the prime minister's residence, as they waited while their masters were entertained at official functions.<sup>19</sup>

Another divergence from viceregal entertaining that continues to date is the prohibitionist Rajaji's ruling against serving liquor in the house.<sup>20</sup> The first president, Rajendra Prasad, as a Gandhian was cut from the same cloth as the last governor general. At a luncheon given in his honour by an Indian prince, he was told that the colourless gin, which was being passed around among the drinkers on the table, was iced sherbet!<sup>21</sup> It is an ironic fact that, during the early days of Independence, the Anglicised officer class often felt out of their depth dealing with their new compatriot political masters, who came mainly from rural, traditional backgrounds and preferred a simple, austere lifestyle.<sup>22</sup> On an occasion of travelling with the president in the state train, the commandant of the GGBG, Major Mohammad Mirza, cringed when his little daughter, Rebab, innocently asked the president to take his elbows off the dining table.<sup>23</sup> President Prasad, however, disarmingly agreed that '*bitiya*' was right. He is warmly remembered for his kindly personality. Syeda Mirza, the wife of Mohammad Mirza, recalls that the president would introduce his staff and their families as: '*yeh sab mere bacche hain*'.<sup>24</sup>

*CLOCKWISE. Rajaji takes a turn at ploughing the fields that replaced the golf course in Government House, 1949 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*The first Indian commandant of the Governor General's Bodyguard, Major Thakur Govind Singh, and the adjutant, Captain S. Bharat Singh, are dashing as they pose against the commandant's open-top jeep (Source: Sneh Govind Singh)*

*Although Rajaji was initially uncomfortable with the colonial legacy of Government House, he good-naturedly took it in his stride, even using the viceregal carriage for jaunts in the estate. Using the horse-drawn vehicle may also have appealed to his Gandhian instincts as an austerity measure. He is seen here with one of his grandchildren (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*In the early years after Independence, Nehru's cabinet would meet with the governor general for lunch every Friday. Seen here from left to right are Govind Ballabh Pant, Jagjiwan Ram, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajaji and Nehru. They feast on an Indian meal as Indian cuisine began replacing the Anglo-French cuisine served during the viceregal period (Source: Alkazi Collection of Photography, photo by Homai Vyaravalla)*



In fact, he seems to have been something of a beloved patriarch to the residents of the President's Estate. He overcame bureaucratic hurdles to arrange funds to subsidise the education of the children of the subordinate staff at the estate.<sup>25</sup> To date, a large bust of the first president greets students in the front lawn of the President's Estate school, also known as the Dr Rajendra Prasad Sarvodaya Vidyalaya.

President Prasad is also remembered for setting the precedent for a non-partisan head of state and Indianising the Rashtrapati Bhavan as it began to shed its colonial legacy.<sup>26</sup> He began by renaming it by the name it has hence been known, the Rashtrapati Bhavan (President's House).<sup>27</sup> He decided that khadi would be the fabric of choice at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, including the uniforms of the domestic staff. He would later propose that the uniforms of all the domestic staff were replaced with simple white tunics and trousers—he resented the headgear in their current uniforms as it reminded him of the turbans worn by sepoys in the East India Company. This proposal was shot down by the prime minister, Nehru, who felt that 'Rashtrapati Bhavan needed colour and tradition . . . as the foremost state mansion, which does not only house the Head of the State where the highest foreign dignitaries stay during their visit to the capital'.<sup>28</sup> At present, the household attendants don their elaborate uniforms on only ceremonial occasions and wear simple white tunics and trousers otherwise. Besides western style china and glassware, Indian style silverware was also introduced.<sup>29</sup> President Prasad had the guest wing redecorated to reflect the cottage industries of the different states and commissioned a series of portraits of eminent Indian personalities for the public spaces of the house.<sup>30</sup> The recent renovation of the guest wing has also sought to highlight Indian furnishings.<sup>31</sup> A more 'controversial' attempt at Indianisation by President Prasad was the imposition of Hindi in the official dealings of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.<sup>32</sup>

A major step towards 'democratising' the Rashtrapati Bhavan, putting it to public use as well as increasing public access, was undertaken in 1949, lasting throughout the two terms of Prasad's presidency, when it housed the National Museum. The National Museum decade of the Rashtrapati Bhavan is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

*CLOCKWISE, Rajaji along with his extended family at Government House. After viceregal formality, the first Indian family at the house brought cheerful informality to it (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*Rajaji inspects the refugee camps set up in the governor general's estate in the aftermath of Partition. Owing to the large influx of refugees to Delhi from western Punjab, many nationalists leaders went out of their way to assist the refugees by providing them with temporary accommodation and food (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*In another instance of Rajaji playing along with the pre-existing culture of Government House, he tries his hand at billiards (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

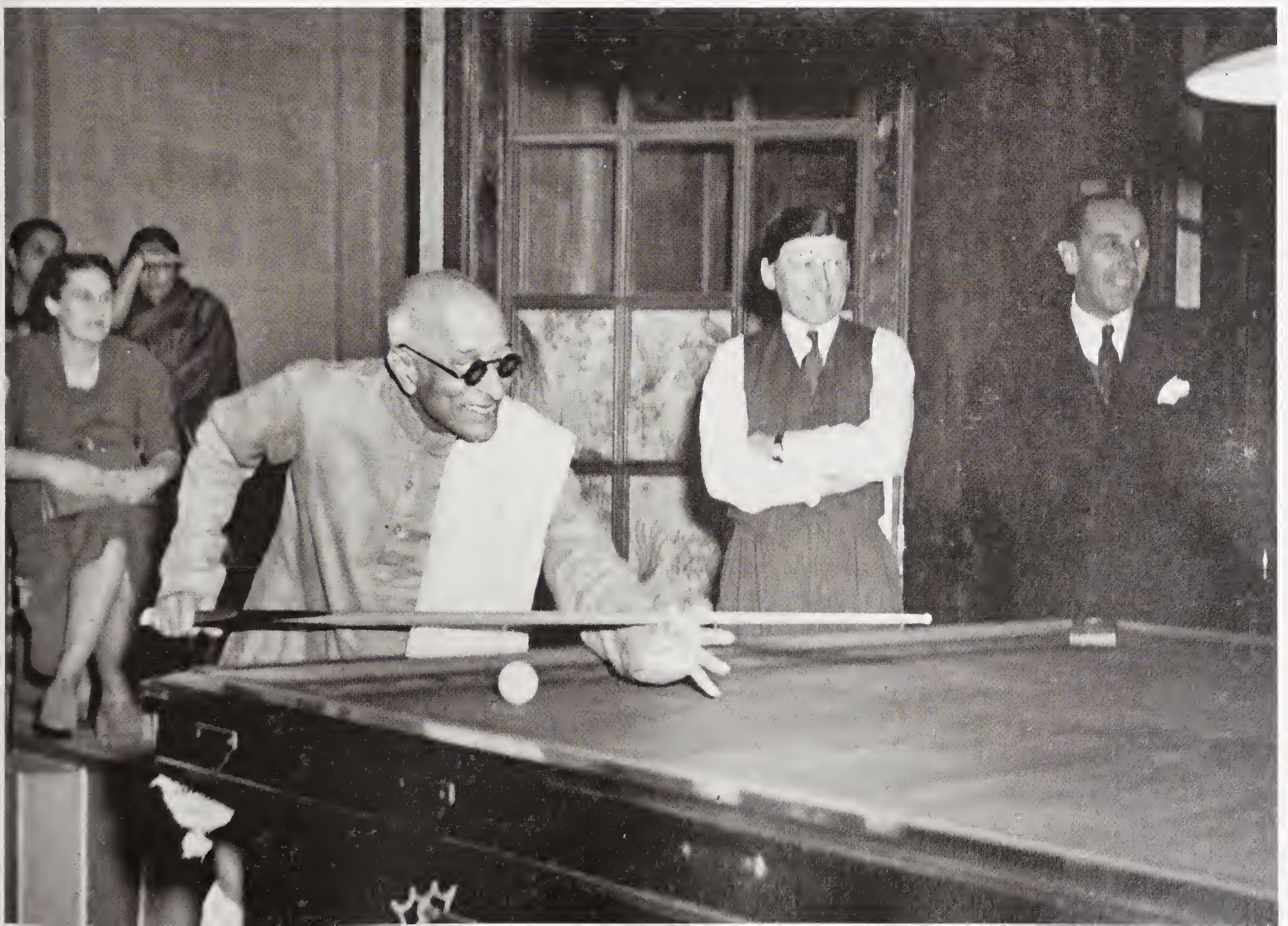
*NEXT PAGE (p62) CLOCKWISE, Group photo of President Rajendra Prasad with the cricket team President's Estate XI and UK High Commissioner's XI after a friendly match at the estate (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*A throng of dignitaries in the Mughal Garden surround President Rajendra Prasad during an at-home function (Source: Private Collection, The City Palace, Jaipur)*

*Members of the President's Bodyguard (originally the Governor General's Bodyguard) and their guests enjoy an informal evening of games at the President's Estate. Second from the right is the young adjutant of the PBG, Captain Bhavani Singh, one of the longest-serving officers of the PBG (Source: Private Collection, The City Palace, Jaipur)*

*NEXT PAGE (p63). A monumental photo of India's first president and prime minister, Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru, on the grand staircase of the Rashtrapati Bhavan just before they leave for the Republic Day parade, 1959, their faces appearing as though carved in stone (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*















## GANDHIAN-SOCIALIST DISCOMFITURE AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

Indian Independence was part of a larger world-wide decolonisation movement. Through the 1950s and 60s, leaders of former colonies such as Sukarno of Indonesia, Malik Ghulam Muhammad of Pakistan and Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam were celebrated state guests at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, feted as kindred spirits. These were inspiring, hopeful times. The state banquet in honour of Ho Chi Minh in 1958 turned out to be quite memorable as the chief guest balked at the strict protocol governing such formal dining and proceeded to remove the place cards assigning seats at the table.<sup>33</sup> Bemused guests, however, remembered where they were supposed to sit and sat precisely there but the unconventional Vietnamese leader had made his point!

The second and third Presidents of India, S. Radhakrishnan and Zakir Husain, were well-prepared for the role, having served as vice presidents. Both were scholars and educationists bringing high ideals to the institution and the house of the president. President Radhakrishnan continued the process of reinterpreting the presidential inheritance of colonial institutions, taking the landmark decision of donating the former Viceregal Lodge in Shimla, renamed Rashtrapati Niwas (President's Residence) in 1950, to the country as an institute of higher research in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>34</sup> Contemporaries of the president from the Rashtrapati Bhavan remember him as an awe-inspiring figure, immaculate in a spotless white *achkan* and turban.<sup>35</sup>

As a widower, President Radhakrishnan had lived with a small family consisting of his son, S. Gopal, and his daughter-in-law in the sprawling Rashtrapati Bhavan. President Husain also brought a small family including his wife, Shah Jehan Begum, and a lively young granddaughter, Niloufer, to the Rashtrapati Bhavan.<sup>36</sup> A small band of helpers from the vice president's house also accompanied him and were settled into the staff of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. During his presidency, the family wing became a kind of traditional Indian home as the president's wife was in purdah and was visited in private by the wives of the officers and other female residents of the estate. Family meals were also largely prepared in the private kitchen under the supervision of Shah Jehan Begum, although Raj style treats favoured by Niloufer, such as cherry meringue, were sent from the Rashtrapati Bhavan kitchen to the

*The president and prime minister, Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru, ride in an open-top Cadillac with Kliment Voroshilov, president of the USSR, in the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, 1960 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*











ABOVE AND FACING PAGE, TOP. States events in honour of the shah of Iran including an exhibition polo match and a banquet, 1956. At the polo match, the shah, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and the shahbano, Fawzia Fuad, sit on either side of President Rajendra Prasad. The next sofa is occupied by Nehru and his daughter, Indira. She sits next to the shah at the banquet as the president makes his speech. Through the 1950s, Indira Gandhi served as the unofficial hostess at state events at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Here she is looking glamorous in a brocade sari at the banquet (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

FACING PAGE, BELOW. Ho Chi Minh, the father of the modern nation of Vietnam, was a particularly feted guest in New Delhi. India and Vietnam felt a strong sense of kinship based on their recent anti-colonial movements. Ho Chi Minh is seen here being entertained by President Rajendra Prasad at a state banquet and reception (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

NEXT PAGE CLOCKWISE (p68). President Rajendra Prasad receives the credentials of the high commissioner of Pakistan, Ghaznafar Ali Khan. Today, the president receives the credentials of incoming ambassadors in the Ashoka Hall

A historic photo of the president, Rajendra Prasad, with the vice president, later his successor, S. Radhakrishnan, and Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia (Source: Private Collection, The City Palace, Jaipur)

President S. Radhakrishnan watches troupes of folk dancers performing in the Mughal Garden (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

President Zakir Husain with his wife, Shah Jahan Begum, and their children and grandchildren in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, 1969 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

The effortless glamour of the ladies who resided at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the 60s. Pictured here is President Zakir Husain's granddaughter Niloufer alongside her friend (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

The film star Waheeda Rehman looks beautiful as she receives a National Award from President S. Radhakrishnan, 1963 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

NEXT PAGE CLOCKWISE (p69). President V.V. Giri and his wife, Saraswati Bai, had a large family of 14 children, and they were known to run the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the manner of a traditional Indian household. The Giris are seen here entertaining foreign guests in the Mughal Garden, 1971 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

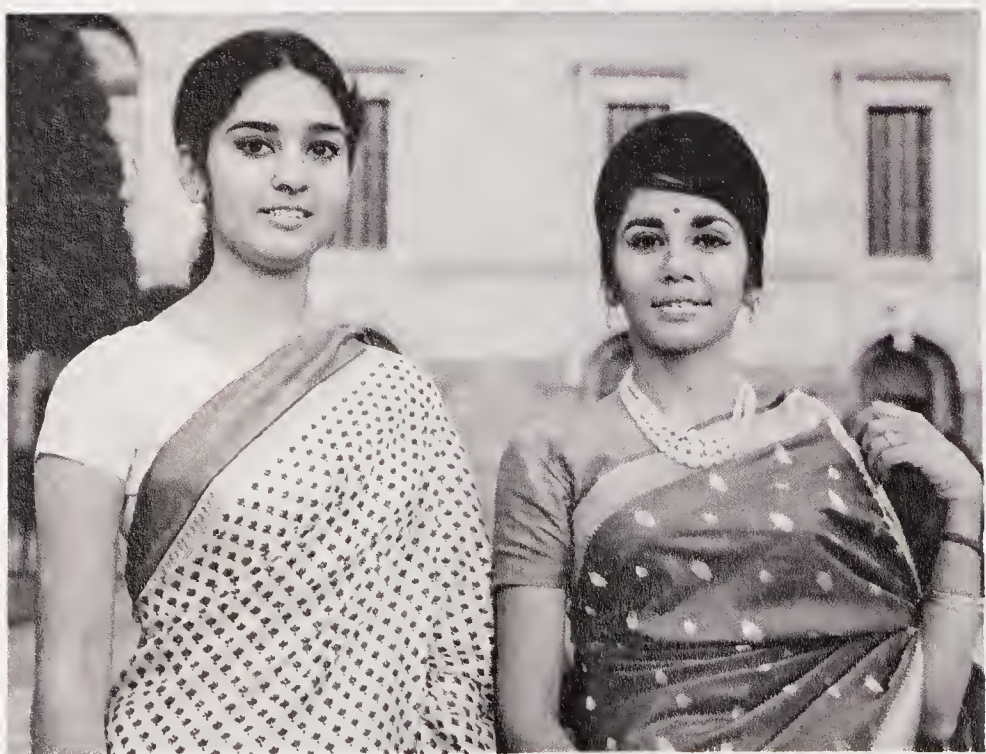
Saraswati Bai makes herself comfortable at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as she winnows rice, 1972 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

President Zakir Husain addressing President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia in 1967 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

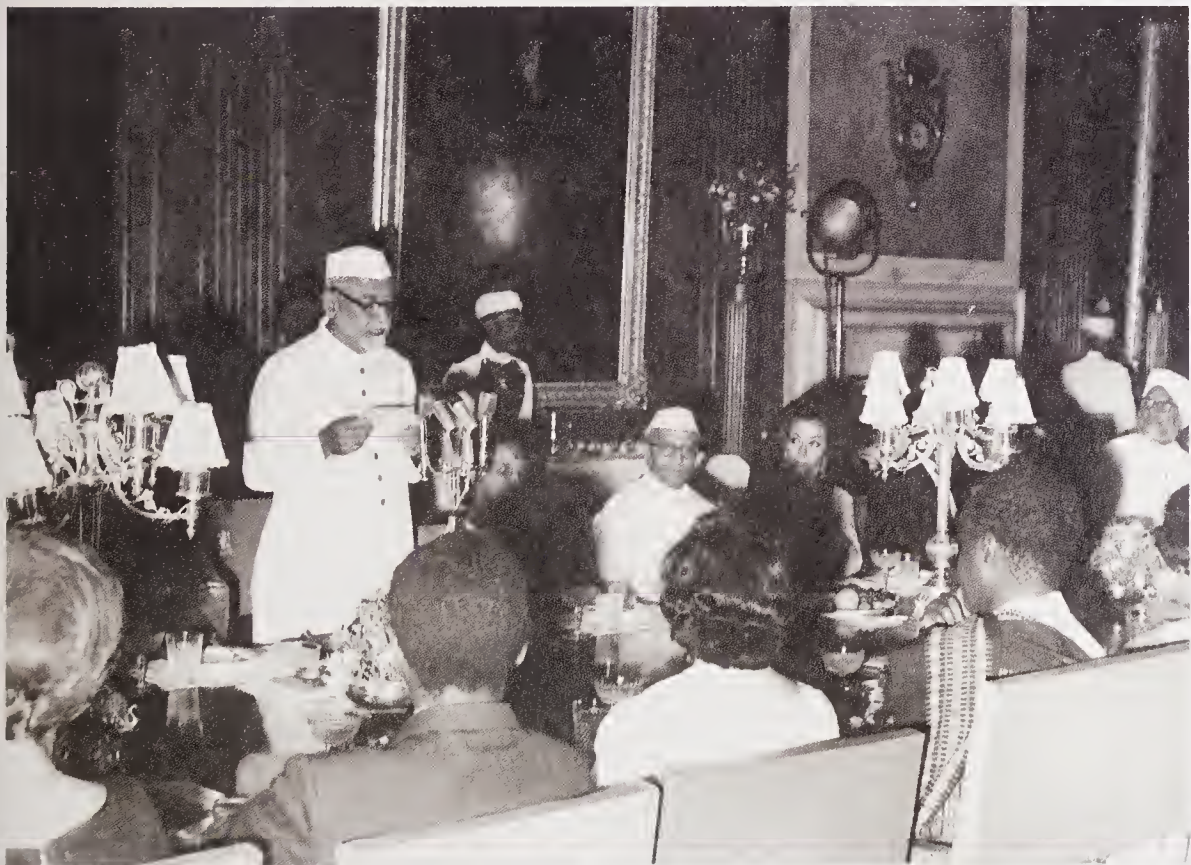














family wing and the president himself took interest in the menu for state banquets. Niloufer's impression of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a luxurious hotel also testifies to the initial unease experienced by the first few Indian presidential families in making a home of the palatial residence. Nonetheless, life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan unfolded even for the Husains as Niloufer fell in love with, and later married, one of her grandfather's ADCs, Captain R.V.N. Menon, after ensuring that she chose those days when he was on 'family duty' for her grandmother and her drive around the estate! The tragic chapter in their lives there was the death of the president in office that shook the entire estate, and, indeed, the country. His body lay in state in the Durbar Hall and the flag on the dome of the Rashtrapati Bhavan flew at half-mast. It had become a home for the family, the final home of Zakir Husain, and Shah Jehan Begum insisted that she would complete her official mourning period of 40 days in the place where he had died.

Considering his background as a labour leader, the fourth president, V.V. Giri, brought a certain informality and a concern with austerity to the Rashtrapati Bhavan. He was accompanied by the first large presidential family ranging across three generations at the Rashtrapati Bhavan; besides his wife, Saraswati Bai, different members of the families of his 14 children lived with him at different times. It is possible that the presence of a large family helped in making a home of the Rashtrapati Bhavan more successfully than during previous presidencies. Three of his ADCs, Ajit Sehgal, Alok Chandola and Ranbir Talwar, attest to the homely environment under the Giris and recall Saraswati Bai as a motherly, albeit colourful, character who took the young ADCs under her wing.<sup>37</sup> They have fond memories of having a fresco breakfast in the Mughal Garden with the president's family, organising parties for their friends and even keeping dogs as pets, one of which had a penchant for taking naps on the mat outside the president's study. Against the backdrop of the food crisis of the mid-60s and the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, the socialist president enforced frugality at the Rashtrapati Bhavan such as removing wheat-based items from the menus of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, simple menus at wedding banquets in the estate and putting a cap on the food allowance of the ADCs. During the Bangladesh Liberation War, a sense of tension and excitement pervaded the air as the prime minister, Indira Gandhi, and the chief of the army, General Sam Manekshaw, would visit the president regularly for war briefings.<sup>38</sup> The gardeners reminisce about not being able to use lights in the Dalikhana in the evening for fear of drawing attention in case an air raid was being planned.<sup>39</sup>

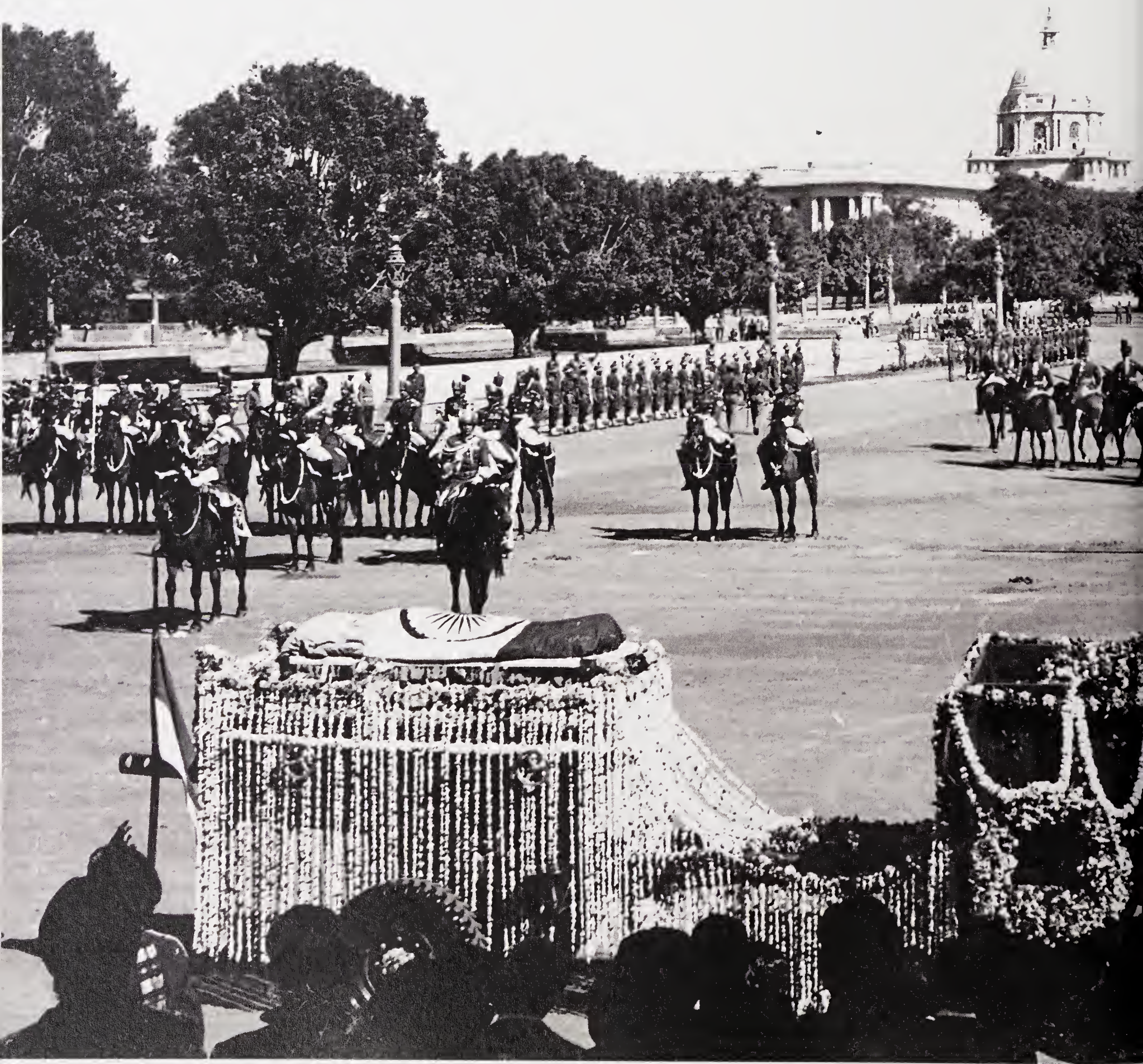
*President S. Radhakrishnan addresses the nation in a television broadcast to inaugurate the daily service of the Delhi Television Centre from his historic desk in the president's study, 1965 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*















## RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN IN NATIONAL UPIHEAVALS

Perhaps the first presidential wife to make a mark as a 'first lady' was Begum Abida Ahmed, the wife of President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. She would confer with the cooks to plan the menu for state banquets and instruct the malis on laying flowerbeds.<sup>40</sup> Many tasteful art objects in the collection of the Rashtrapati Bhavan are recorded to have been acquired by her to decorate the house.<sup>41</sup> Having said that, her husband proceeded to undo those decorating efforts when he converted the Long Drawing Room into an indoor badminton court.<sup>42</sup> President Ahmed's legacy is considered a chequered one as he sanctioned the state of Emergency in India on the recommendation of the union cabinet. But it is a sign of the nervousness he would have felt signing the decree enacting Emergency that the secretary to the president, K. Balachandran, came out of the president's study to look for a pen for the president to sign the decree, reports Ranbir Talwar, who was the ADC on duty that day.<sup>43</sup> On 11 February 1977, President Ahmed suddenly died of a heart attack. Ram Charan Singh, who retired in 2014 as a horticultural superintendent, then a gardener, recalls the preparations for the funeral: 'As the president's body lay in state, we, the gardeners, worked hard to arrange fresh flowers, clear the fading flowers, make wreaths for all visiting dignitaries. We were on duty day and night for three days.'<sup>44</sup>

President Ahmed's successor, President Reddy, overcame initial

*President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed's death in office in 1975 is etched in the memories of the old-timers at the President's Estate as one of the most tumultuous times in the history of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The gardeners worked around the clock and used flowers from the estate gardens to prepare the funeral flowers. His funeral cortege was escorted by the President's Bodyguard as he was given a state funeral (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*



doubts about moving into the Rashtrapati Bhavan, as previously discussed, and became concerned with renovating the interiors and exteriors of the building as befitting its exalted status,<sup>45</sup> although he is said to have missed the painting by the celebrated Indian modernist M.F. Husain!<sup>46</sup> President Reddy is remembered as a disciplinarian president; gone were the days of previous presidencies such as Giri's marked by a certain informality and ease of access.<sup>47</sup> He was concerned with curbing the access of the political and diplomatic elite of Delhi used to frequenting the estate for sporting facilities and recreational activities.<sup>48</sup> One example of the Rashtrapati Bhavan's centrality to the elite social world of Delhi was the location of the top polo club, the Delhi Polo Club, at the President's Bodyguard (PBG). Although the adjutant of the PBG during Reddy's presidency, Hardeep Singh, reminisces about the headiness that came with high-level polo matches with teams from different embassies and post-match parties, he also conceded that too many visitors had the run of the estate.<sup>49</sup> In 1983, the club became more restricted to the PBG as the President's Estate Polo Club and was finally shifted to the Delhi cantonment and taken over by the 61 Cavalry unit in 1995.<sup>50</sup>

The next president, Giani Zail Singh, had an uneven time at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Even when he was elected president, it was not clear that he was enthused at the prospect; he was associated more with 'the earthiness of rural India' than with 'the ponderous, bureaucratic' environment of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.<sup>51</sup> But it was, in fact, his earthy charm that endeared him to the residents of the estate. During an open-house film screening, the president's little grandson was being mischievous, running around, pinching and bothering the audience, until one of them shooed him away. At which point, the presidential grandson tried to complain to his grandfather about that person, but received no sympathy as he was told that 'neither will you watch the film yourself nor let the others watch in peace.'<sup>52</sup>

President Zail Singh was sworn into office in 1982; the Indian Army Operation Bluestar to flush out Sikh militants from the Golden Temple was carried out in 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards later in the year, followed by the retaliatory anti-Sikh riots. The president recorded painful memories of the riots as he was besieged by telephone calls and personal appeals of victims caught up in the violence.<sup>53</sup> Just as the PBG, then the GGBG divided into Muslim and Sikh troops, resisted the communal tensions of Partition, the regiment is reported to have been remarkably peaceful within the confines

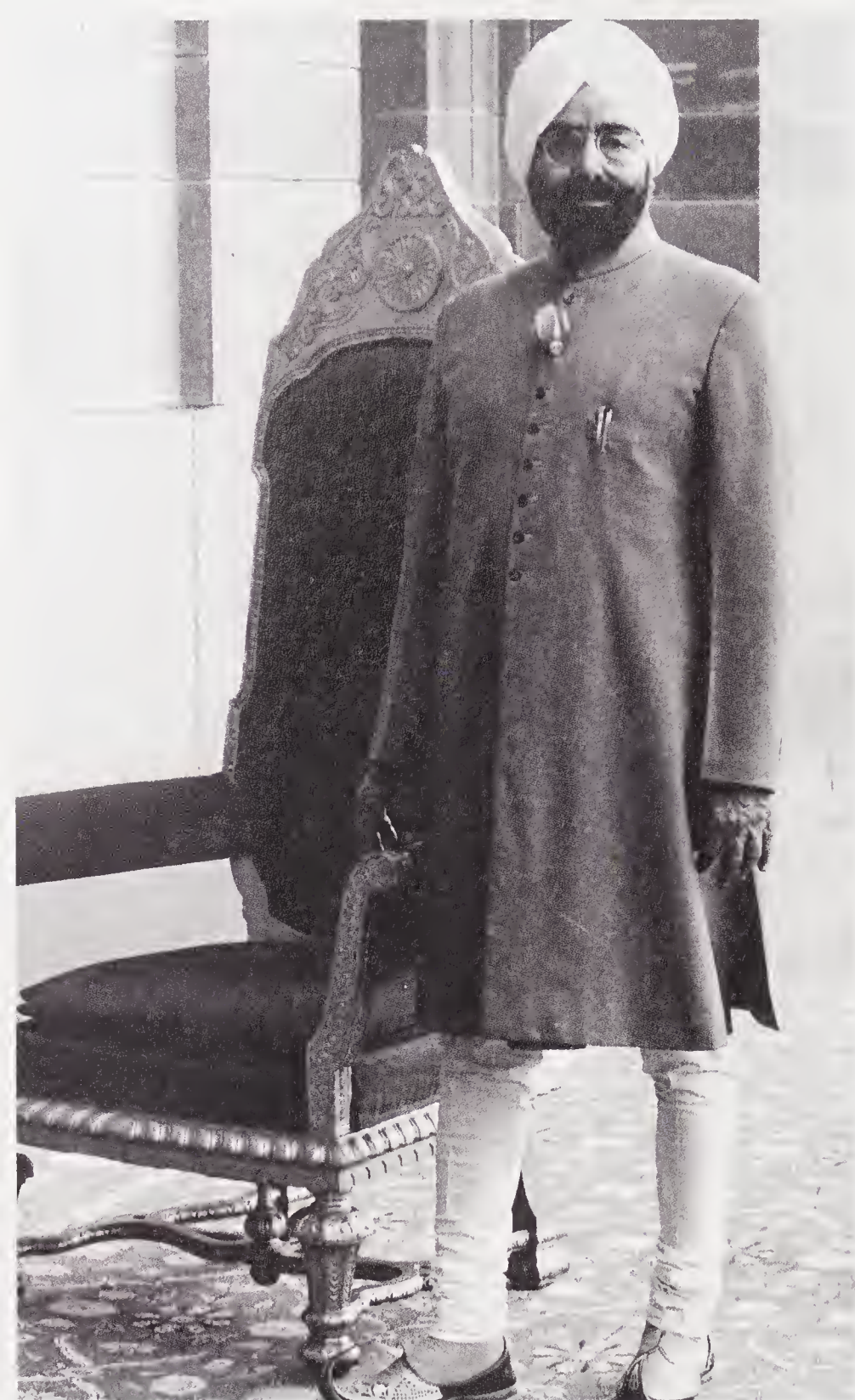
*FACING PAGE, ABOVE. President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and the 'first lady', Begum Abida Ahmed, entertain the Hungarian prime minister, Jeno Fock, in the state drawing room (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*FACING PAGE, BELOW THREE IMAGES. On the death of President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the 'janaza' (funerary prayer) in the Mughal Garden; led by the prime minister, Indira Gandhi, ladies pay their condolences to Begum Abida Ahmed; and people pay their respects as the president lies in state in the Durbar Hall, in remarkable series of images (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*









of the President's Estate during the anti-Sikh riots although one-third of it is still Sikh (the other two components are Jats and Rajputs).<sup>54</sup> Dafedar Sundar Singh Tanwar was quick to point out that the PBG is based on close ties as the same families have served in the unit for two to three generations and the different families have been close over these generations.<sup>55</sup> It is difficult to distrust family friends even if Sikhs elsewhere are being seen suspiciously (in another example of disturbances affecting one community at the macro level but not the unit at the micro level, Tanwar pointed out the recent Jat agitations for reserved status have not touched the Jat component of the PBG).

One of the single-most transformational outcomes of such national upheavals was the increased security and difficulty of access at sites such as the Rashtrapati Bhavan. It affected the residents of the President's Estate from the president, R. Venkataraman, who could not even take a walk in the Mughal Garden without 'officers at [his] heels and security men breathing over [his] shoulder,'<sup>56</sup> to the rest. For example, that wonderful tradition of inclusive film screenings remembered nostalgically by generations of residents had to be sacrificed with heightened security.<sup>57</sup> The coachmen looking after the carriages and coaches that presidents used to travel in on state occasions felt left out after their presidential use was abandoned. This practice was only recently revived by President Pranab Mukherjee.<sup>58</sup>

Heads of state since Rajaji had complained about the loss of privacy, personal space and time the job of the president entails. The governor general had likened the experience to being in a zoo.<sup>59</sup> President Venkataraman, reflecting on his time as president four decades later, complained about the restrictions placed on a president based on pre-existing ideas about how a president should conduct himself.<sup>60</sup> Like a number of his successors, President Venkataraman was concerned with austerity, especially

*ABOVE. President Giani Zail Singh strikes a stately pose, 1985 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*BELOW. Women from the estate celebrate Rakhi as they tie 'rakhis' on the wrist of their 'brother', the president, Giani Zail Singh, 1982 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

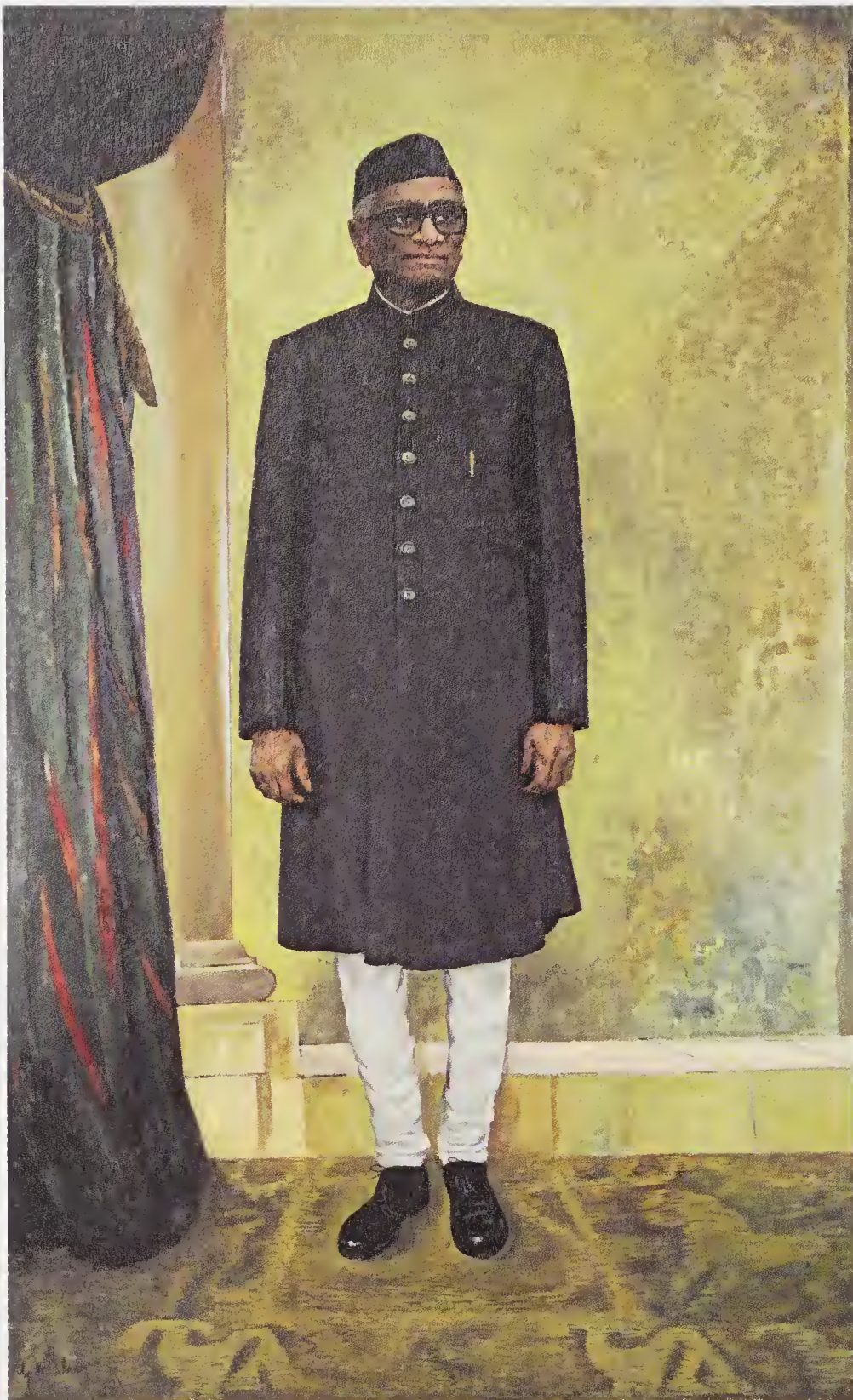
*FACING PAGE. In a delightful photo, President Shankar Dayal Sharma feeds the horses on a round of the President's Bodyguard lines. The commandant of the PBG, Colonel Aditya Singh, looks on (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*











in light of the foreign exchange crisis that coincided with his presidency, taking such measures as reducing the number of state visits within India and abroad, auctioning off fuel-inefficient, high-maintenance imported cars, and taking a 10 percent cut in his salary.<sup>61</sup>

President Venkataraman, followed by President Kalam and President Mukherjee took special interest in art and culture at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Under President Venkataraman, an inventory of the art collection was commissioned and two museums were established. Paintings and statues from the viceregal period were taken out of storage and put on display in one of the museums, the Marble Hall Museum. Since the space for this museum in one of the main corridors on the ground floor of the Rashtrapati Bhavan was fixed, one of the expert consultants, the historian Narayani Gupta, remembers selecting the portraits on the basis of their size to fit the alcoves in the hall and then placing them as sequentially as possible.<sup>62</sup> Presidential gifts and curios were housed in the other museum, also known as the Toshakhana. Later, President Kalam would add the Kitchen Museum to recreate colonial dining culture, making use of obsolete colonial-period crockery, cutlery and utensils. President Mukherjee has built a public museum complex, the Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum, in Schedule B of the estate, and most of the objects from the earlier museums have been located in it. President Venkataraman introduced music and dance recitals in the film theatre in the basement, President Kalam built the auditorium complex with a view to a bigger audience and frequent performances and President Mukherjee regularly presides over cultural performances at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.



*ABOVE.* It is fitting that the presidential portrait of Neelam Sanjiva Reddy was painted by the leading modernist K.S. Kulkarni since the president himself took an interest in the arts and interiors of the Rashtrapati Bhavan (Location: Rashtrapati Bhavan Banquet Hall, photo by Joginder Singh)

*BELOW AND FACING PAGE.* 'The golfer presidents'—at least two presidents, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and R. Venkataraman, made the most of the picturesque nine-hole golf course of the estate (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

*FOLLOWING SPREAD.* Presidents R. Venkataraman and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam feed fawns of spotted deer in the deer park at the estate (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)





















## DOME OVER INDIA

In 2002, President K.R. Narayanan commissioned a comprehensive overview of the Rashtrapati Bhavan exploring its history from the colonial period to the present and its different aspects. This book, *Dome over India* by Aman Nath, is the forerunner to the Multi-Volume Documentation Project, of which this book is a part, commissioned by President Mukherjee.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the recent tenures of Presidents Narayanan, Kalam, Pratibha Devisingh Patil and Mukherjee are marked by a certain continuity, with each presidency building on the legacy of previous ones. This is not surprising as all these presidencies have unfolded within the post-Liberalisation framework driven by information technology.

President Narayanan's financial advisor, Mohan Joseph, associates the 10th presidency, the first of the 21st century, with the introduction of modern technology from Motorola Moto mobile phones—bulky handsets compared to the sleek mobile phones available today to the internet.<sup>64</sup> However, as welcome as the upgradation of facilities is, there persists a touch of nostalgia for the older times; the long-serving daftari Mahesh Anand remembers the evocative sound of the clicking of the typewriter, a sure sign that the typist was hard at work.<sup>65</sup> A website was also launched offering a virtual tour of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in lieu of the real thing as security considerations peaked turning the national monument into a fortress.<sup>66</sup> At present, security concerns are balanced with outreach programmes including public tours thrice a week.

President Narayanan was suave in his handling of interpersonal relationships within the estate. Indeed, presidents who are perceived to have made a special effort to engage with the residents of the estate hold a special place in the collective memory of the residents. Presidential gestures have been important in fostering a sense of family across distinctions within the estate. On his retirement from the PBG, the former risaldar major, Bhanwar Singh Rathore and his family were delighted to be asked to tea in the Ashoka Hall by President Narayanan.<sup>67</sup> The president also had as his guest to tea, the daughter of the postman at the estate, after he learned that she had topped an exam.<sup>68</sup>

*In a break from tradition, the state banquet in honour of the president of the USA, Barack Obama, was held in open air in the Mughal Garden, in place of the banquet hall. The first woman President of India, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, gives a speech to welcome the American president as he and the Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh, on her right look on. President Patil took a keen interest in entertaining at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and is fondly remembered by the butlers for her warm personality (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*





His successor, President Kalam, is remembered as 'the people's president' inside the President's Estate as much as outside. The general impression among estate dwellers is of a warm personality, who was not just approachable, but would walk up to them in informal settings, such as in the course of a walk in the estate as well as on formal meetings on occasions, such as religious festivals.<sup>69</sup> President Kalam seems to have been a throwback on the less formal presidents of yesteryear, mingling with guests and residents freely, and even doing away with a formal dress code at receptions such as at-homes.<sup>70</sup> Dafedar Sundar Singh Tanwar vividly remembers the sight of the president taking brisk walks in the estate and distributing caps among the children.<sup>71</sup> Tanwar and many others credit him with sprucing up the estate. It was during his presidency that much of the colonial-period accommodation of the subordinate staff was replaced with spacious flats.<sup>72</sup> Besides the Kitchen Museum, other quaint additions to the Rashtrapati Bhavan by President Kalam include an herb garden and a children's gallery. It is a reflection of his humanitarian and modernising vision that facilities for the visually and physically challenged were introduced at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.<sup>73</sup>

In 2007, India received its first woman president, Pratibha Devi Singh Patil. However, after having served under the bachelor President Kalam previously, the ADCs were unprepared to look after a presidential family. Old records, books and accounts by former ADCs discussing family duty with the presidential family were dug up and crammed before they felt ready for the changed situation.<sup>74</sup> All that hard work paid off and her ADCs think of President Patil as a mother figure.<sup>75</sup> The original décor of the state banquet hall on the first floor of the Rashtrapati Bhavan included portraits of the viceroys hung on the longer walls of the rectangular room, but the top ends of the two walls were left bare. Later, in the post-Independence period, the viceregal portraits were replaced with portraits of the presidents. Decorative arms, originally from the banquet hall in the Viceregal Lodge in Shimla, were added above the portraits. President Patil made a significant point when she had the arms removed and replaced with red and gold panels featuring embroidery symbolising the different Indian states. She felt that arms did not befit dining conviviality and, moreover, were inappropriate decoration in a country that had attained freedom from colonisation largely based on the



principle of ahimsa or non-violence.<sup>76</sup> Her contribution to the modernisation of the President's Estate was bringing it into the fold of the Project Roshni of the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) with a view to set an example as a eco-friendly and sustainable habitat.<sup>77</sup> It became the first urban habitat in the country to be ISO certified following the introduction of solar power and waste management systems in 2010.<sup>78</sup>

Since Independence, the permanent residents have come to feel a sense of belonging to the estate. Even the temporary residents have felt its pull as they have kept up their ties with it. However, it would be simplistic to call them one large community. Life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan is as varied and as complex as anywhere else—even if it is mitigated by beautiful surroundings, plentiful facilities and a sense of security, not to mention the unique reference point of the president. For example, many of the Rajput wives at the PBG continue to wear their traditional clothes of a long skirt and cover their faces in spite of having lived in cosmopolitan Delhi, on the grounds that many of their kinsmen are with the regiment and orthodox values prevent them from showing their faces in front of such men.

The permanence of service at the Rashtrapati Bhavan (and life at the estate) has had to contend with changes in the style of administration and terms of employment. The subordinate staff of the Rashtrapati Bhavan until very recently were divided into classes I, II, III and IV. Classes I, II and III would comprise of senior and junior clerical positions, while class IV included the butlers, room attendants, cooks, gardeners, drivers and peons. In more recent times, the classes III and IV employees have been clubbed together known as the multi-tasking staff (MTS).<sup>79</sup> Since more than a decade now, the Rashtrapati Bhavan depends on contractual workers to supplement the shortage of staff meant to multi-task from being a peon to a gardener. One might argue that any sense of community at the estate came from a shared corpus of experiences as generation after generation of the same families worked and lived there. Gaurav Kumar, a third-generation butler, values his service very much and is unsure if the age-old traditions of service in the presidential establishment will survive if the work is outsourced to specialists from outside.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Kalpana Kumar, the wife of Vinod, a butler, welcomes the change as countering perverse entitlement,<sup>81</sup> which is reflected in, say, the sweeper's son becoming the sweeper.

By the 21st century presidency of Narayanan, the legacy of the Viceroy's House turned Rashtrapati Bhavan was no longer insecure. It had become 'a home for India'. The details of specific recent developments are discussed in the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters, even as the later chapters touch upon the finer nuances of life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.



*FACING PAGE. Known as 'the people's president' both inside and outside the President's Estate, President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam is photographed here doing what he did best, educating and inspiring the next generation (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*TOP. Major General Vinod Chopra, the military secretary, keeps an eye on the time as he waits for a ceremonial event to begin (Source: Vinod Chopra)*



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NEXT PAGE. *Summer at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The President's Bodyguard brave the Indian summer to practise for a mounted parade in the forecourt*

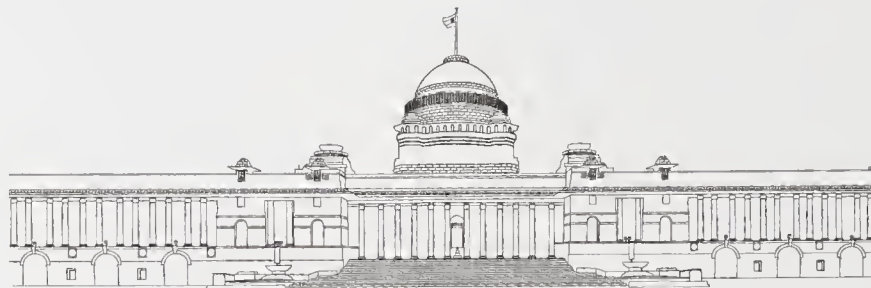












## CHAPTER 4

# RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN AS A REPUBLICAN MONUMENT



Hilal Ahmed

**T**his chapter is primarily concerned with the *public* presence of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Evoking the idea of a ‘public monument’, a specific form in which certain buildings were officially recognised and presented in postcolonial India, the chapter examines the modes in which the Rashtrapati Bhavan is commemorated as a symbol of Indian republicanism.<sup>1</sup>

To trace this public character of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the chapter looks at the three crucial aspects—(a) the transition of Government House (Viceroy’s House) into the officially known Rashtrapati Bhavan in the period 1947–50, (b) evolution of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a site of official commemoration, especially in relation to the Republic Day celebrations, and (c) the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the context of security in the post-1984 period. Although the chapter does not engage with the direct questions of a political nature (such as the changing political role of the institution of the president and so on), it makes an attempt to investigate the constituted idea of republicanism in the postcolonial context. In this sense, the formative years of the republic, 1947–57, are closely examined to study the official norms and traditions that have transformed the Rashtrapati Bhavan into a public monument.

Three clarifications are important here. First, this chapter offers a different perspective to ‘life at Rashtrapati Bhavan’. Recognising this great building as the embodiment of Indian republicanism, this chapter is about the fascinating story of the life outside the Rashtrapati Bhavan: the life that has shaped and nurtured the everyday conduct of those who live and work inside this magnificent building. Precisely because of this reason, the transition of Government House into the Rashtrapati Bhavan (even though it has been covered in the previous chapter from a different perspective) and the story of the National Museum, which was actually evolved as an institution inside Government House, become inseparable features that constituent the Rashtrapati Bhavan’s socio-cultural (and even political) universe.

*The Rashtrapati Bhavan opens onto Rajpath on an axis that leads to India Gate. This axial road is the site of the annual commemoration of modern India, the Republic Day (Photo by Ram Rahman)*









The second clarification is about the relationship between the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the other buildings of New Delhi.<sup>2</sup> The Rashtrapati Bhavan, we must note, has never been projected as an independent monumental or political entity until recently. Hence, an important aspect of its character as a public monument is in relation to other relevant structures such as the Parliament House and India Gate. Finally, the public rituals that make this building a commemorative structure needs some clarification. The popular imaginations of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as an important building of national importance are often determined by the official rituals associated with it such as the Republic Day events (or, to some extent, the annual opening of the Mughal Garden). To make sense of the public receptions of this building, it is, therefore, important to pay close attention to the ways in which various kinds of publics are accommodated in these official rituals. This is what this chapter tries to capture.

*ABOVE. The Exhibition on Indian Art which was organised by the Royal Academy, London, was also displayed in the Rashtrapati Bhavan in 1949. Throngs of Indian citizens could now frequent the space once reserved for their colonial overlords (Source: National Museum Photo Archives)*

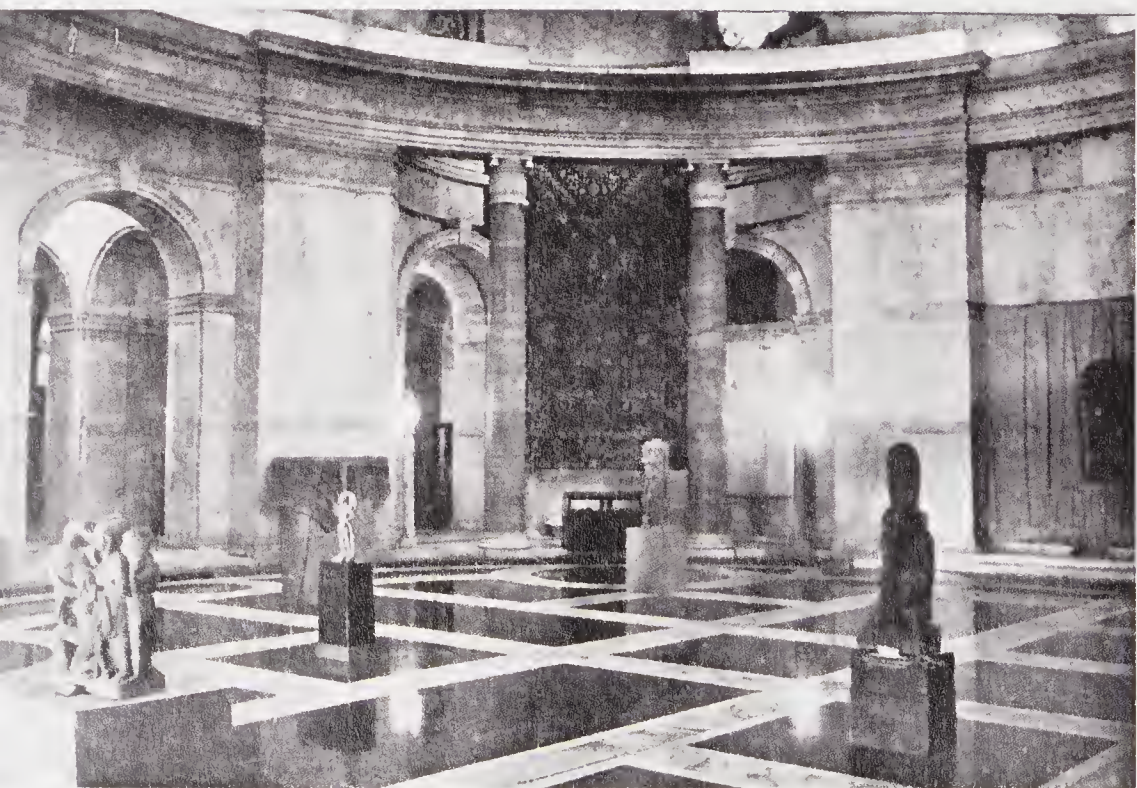
*RIGHT IMAGE AND NEXT PAGE. Many of the larger rooms of the first floor including the Durbar Hall and library were refashioned to serve as exhibition galleries of the first 'National Museum' before it was relocated to its current site in 1960*













## CROWD VERSUS PUBLIC—INSIDE/OUTSIDE THE RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

Two examples—the official ceremony of 15 August 1947 and the establishment of the National Museum in 1949 at Government House—are relevant to understand the crucial transformation of Government House into the Rashtrapati Bhavan.<sup>3</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, as his official correspondence with his colleagues in government as well as with British officials suggest, was keen to evolve a new symbolism to mark the events of 15 August 1947. However, it was a difficult task for two reasons. The radical anti-British symbols, which were central to the Congress' politics of protest, especially the Gandhian satyagrahi tools of passive resistance, were of no use. The British state had already recognised India as an independent political entity (along with Pakistan) and wanted, at least officially, a smooth transition. In such a political environment, it was not at all appropriate for Nehru's government to evoke anti-British radicalism.<sup>4</sup> The second reason was also interesting. New Delhi, the capital city built by the colonial government to underline its historic presence in India, was the site where the rituals of the *Transfer of Power* were to be performed.<sup>5</sup> Although the Red Fort was also part of main ceremony on 15 August, the buildings of New Delhi, especially Government House and the legislative assembly building, eventually emerged as the structures of power in actual political terms. These were the same built structures that were conceptualised as representative of British rule in India by the nationalist elite. Hence, it was very difficult for the Nehru government to offer an alternative and overtly nationalist reading of these colonial buildings in a short span of time.

Despite these two difficulties, Nehru, it seems, was very enthusiastic to accommodate colonial buildings in the official ceremony. It was, in any case, not going to disturb the trajectories of his political imagination. Nehru's historical continuity thesis, which was fully elaborated in his book *Discovery of India* (1944), had conceptualised India as a site of cultural assimilation. In this framework, contributions of different rulers and communities, including the British, which Nehru saw as the imperial power, was to be acknowledged. Hence, the celebration of Independence at Government House, from Nehru's point of view, could not go against the spirit of nationalism until it did not transcend the idea of popular participation. This conceptual-political clarity, as it appears, emerged as an important reference point to envisage Government House as a public monument, a site where the notion of popular control over democratic institutions was to be represented in symbolic terms.

The *Transfer of Power* documents very clearly show that the ceremony of 15 August was going to be a serious event for both the British establishment in India as well as Indian political elites. For the British, it was a mark of a political continuity, while for

Indian political elites, it was a crucial discontinuity, a rupture that had to be fully worked out in the future nation building project. In any case, the event had to accommodate various publics: the English-educated Indians, Europeans, rulers of the princely states and, above all, the common people, the crowd, who had been introduced to the complex world of modern politics a few decades ago.<sup>6</sup> As expected, the 'elite' public was invited inside Government House to witness the transition; while the enthusiastic crowd—the public of a different kind—worked out its own ways to be part of the event. Lord Mountbatten's description of the event is very useful to clarify this crowd-public distinction. He notes:

'The 15th August has certainly turned out to be the most remarkable and inspiring day of my life. We started at 8.30 with the Swearing-In ceremony in the Durbar Hall in front of an official audience of some 500, including a number of ruling Princes. The official guests, including Ambassadors, Princes and the Cabinet, then drove in procession from Government House (ex-Viceroy's House) to the Council Chamber . . . Never have such crowds been seen within the memory of anyone I have spoken to. Not only did they line every rooftop and vantage point, but they pressed round so thick as to become finally quite unmanageable . . . The crowds however were far beyond the control of the police. Some Indian officials estimate that there were 600,000 people there. But personally I doubt if there were more than a quarter of a million. At all events they thronged the processional route and if possible gave my wife and myself a greater reception than in the morning.'<sup>7</sup>

Nehru and many others, however, did not fully subscribe to this crowd-public distinction. Despite the fact that the nature of celebration continued to be elitist in many ways, Government House and the assembly building were also used as political sites to evolve an equally powerful idea of republicanism. The constituent assembly session of 14 August 1947 (where Nehru made his famous 'tryst with destiny' speech) unanimously resolved to adopt the idea of popular control over political apparatus.<sup>8</sup> The crowd that Mountbatten observed outside Government House was going to play a central role—not merely in the functioning of the democratic institutions but also in redefining the fate of colonial buildings such as Government House.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the public reception hosted by the governor general for 2000 dignitaries in Government House on 15 August 1947 fitted very well with the enthusiasm of those who were watching the celebrations from outside.<sup>10</sup>

Moving on to the second example—the story of the National Museum—to further problematise the notion of public in relation to the Rashtrapati Bhavan. In the winter months of 1947–48, the Exhibition of India Art, consisting of exhibits selected from









museums all over India, was sponsored by the Royal Academy and organised in the galleries of Burlington House, London. At this point of time, the government of India decided to exhibit the collection in Delhi. The staterooms of Government House were selected to house this first ever official postcolonial exhibition.<sup>11</sup> It was, in any case, a temporary arrangement. Since the art objects were taken on loan from various museums and private collectors to configure the London exhibition, it was obvious that they would eventually go back to their original locations. However, recognising the wider national significance of this collection, the ministry of education decided to use these objects as sources for implementing its much ambitious project, the National Museum.<sup>12</sup>

The idea to have a national museum in India was not entirely new. In fact, it was one of the central themes in Nehru's imagination of nation building.<sup>13</sup> However, Nehru did not want to establish a conventional museum: he was not in favor of a European style museum that could simply organise historical objects in a chronological order; nor did he want to reproduce an *ajayabghar*, a house of strange objects. He writes:

'Museums are not just places to see old things or *Ajayabghars*, as they used to be called. They are or should be an essential part of the educational system and cultural activities of a country. What is more, they are places for public education. Private houses may have works of art and beauty, but they are not open to public. It is important that every city possesses a museum and, I would add, even villages have their small museums wherever possible . . . Indeed perhaps no single museum, however big, can contain all these many aspects, and it may be desirable to have several museums to exhibit varied cultural and other activities.'<sup>14</sup>

The ideal national museum, in this sense, was to function as a site which could not only display 'unity in diversity' but also unfold the process of 'museumisation' in the country. Precisely because of this reason the possession of the art objects and the location of the museum emerged as important considerations for the government.

The National Museum was inaugurated on 15 August 1949 at Government House (which had not yet become the Rashtrapati Bhavan) and opened for public. However, the government was apprehensive of using this place as the permanent location for the museum for two obvious reasons. By that time, the symbolic function of Government House as the residence of

*'The Political Buddha', the Gupta-period statue of the Buddha behind the president's chair dominates the Durbar Hall. On this occasion, President Pranab Mukherjee felicitates freedom fighters on 9 August 2015 during the annual reception held to honour them prior to Independence Day (Photo by Dheeraj Paul)*



the republican head of the state was not entirely clear. But there was a strong view that Government House should be used for more direct administrative and political purposes. In an official communication regarding the location of the National Museum, Nehru expresses these sentiments:

‘While Government House cannot be the permanent location of a museum, it can serve two purposes: 1) it can be a temporary location till better arrangements are made. 2) It can be a place where temporary exhibitions can be arranged, so that there might be some kind of an exhibition more or less continuously. Of course this may not be necessary when a really good museum has been set up. As this will take some time, the Government House may continue to house various exhibits.’<sup>15</sup>

There was another reason. As pointed out earlier, Nehru wanted to utilise the institution of the National Museum for creating political and cultural awareness. The composite nationalism, which Nehru had argued for in his writings, was to be embodied in administrative terms. The National Museum was the site where it would be possible to showcase India’s plurality in a systematic and organised manner. However, in order to create an ideal public—a citizenry of a historically evolving nation, it was important to establish a direct link between the art objects kept in the National Museum as relics of a bygone era and the development-oriented nation building project of the state. Government House, which had acquired a political relevance of its own after the 15 August ceremony and thus was to be separated from the institution of the National Museum, which was to function as a knowledge centre. Following these concerns, the foundation stone of the building of the National Museum was laid in 1955. The museum building was completed in 1960 and was opened for public. All the art objects were transferred to the new building from the Rashtrapati Bhavan. However, two sculptures—the Mauryan bull and the Sarnath Buddha—were retained.<sup>16</sup>

The 15 August ceremony and the story of the National Museum simply goes beyond the crowd-public distinction. The public was no longer defined in terms of the power and prestige of individuals; instead, people from all walks of life were encouraged to participate in the carefully planned events. Even the Partition violence could not affect the state’s enthusiasm for popular participation. However, at the same time, a conscious decision was taken to educate the public and make them proper citizens.<sup>17</sup> Government House, which was built to accommodate traditions of Indian rulers in the British imagination of a new capital of the empire, New Delhi, was also re-interpreted creatively by the postcolonial state. This symbol of empire was transformed into a public building—a building that was, in principle, owned by the people of India and possessed by their representatives even before the constitution declared India as a republic.

*RIGHT. The Rampurva Bull Capital, Mauryan period, 3rd century BCE, on the porch of Rashtrapati Bhavan—a sign of political continuity (Photo by Ram Rahman)*













## CELEBRATING RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN: RITUALS OF THE REPUBLIC

The annual Republic Day celebrations and the first general election of 1952 redefined the public life of Government House (that eventually became the Rashtrapati Bhavan).<sup>18</sup> Rajendra Prasad succeeded C. Rajagopalachari as the first President of India on 26 January 1950. The oath ceremony took place in the Durbar Hall of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. It was followed by a day-long celebration of the Republic Day. According to the newspaper reports, the president came out from the Rashtrapati Bhavan in his coach which was drawn by six bay horses and escorted by his mounted bodyguard. A large number of people greeted him on his way to the Irwin Stadium (that later became the National Stadium), where the main parade was organised.<sup>19</sup> After the parade, President Prasad also visited Old Delhi.

If we closely follow the symbolism associated with this sequence of events, two very clear public imaginations of the Rashtrapati Bhavan come up. Government House, which did not have any clear status until now, actually, turned out to be the site where the institution of the president was established. This transformation gave a new definitive public life to this building for the first time in postcolonial India. On the other hand, the Republic Day event expanded the scope of the symbolic presence of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in an unprecedented way. The participation of the president in a public function that marked the birth of a new republic, his intermingling with people waiting outside the Rashtrapati Bhavan, and the parade ceremony and his extensive tour of the city indicate that the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a representative building of the new republic was commemorated, at least symbolically, outside its own built space.

The 1952 elections (for the parliament, state assemblies, president and vice president) was one of the most decisive moments of Indian democracy. The republicanism based on elected representatives, which was still a political idea, translated in actual sense in the 1952 general election. The political enthusiasm of the voters defied all apprehensions about the possible success of democracy in India. The elections for the upper house of the parliament (Council of the State, which was renamed the Rajya Sabha in 1954) and the state assemblies, technically paved the way for the first presidential election. Rajendra Prasad (Congress) defeated K.T. Shah (Independent) by a margin of over three lakh votes to become the elected president of the country on 6 May 1952.

*President Rajendra Prasad in his horse-drawn carriage in Chandni Chowk on the occasion of the first Republic Day parade (Source: PBG Albums)*





TOP. A display of republicanism—the oath taking ceremony of President Rajendra Prasad in the Durbar Hall, 1950 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

MIDDLE. President Rajendra Prasad with his military secretary, Bimanesh Chatterjee, proceeding to inspect a guard of honour in the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, 1950 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

BOTTOM. President Rajendra Prasad in his horse-drawn carriage on Rajpath, descending Raisina Hill on the occasion of the Republic Day parade, 1953 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

FACING PAGE. President Rajendra Prasad taking the salute as columns of armoured cars pass, 26 January 1953 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)





This overwhelmingly positive response to democracy also had a direct impact on the institution of the president. Prasad was of the view that the oath taking ceremony of the elected president should be observed with some kind of public symbolism. In a letter to Nehru, he suggested:

‘(1) A particular kind of dress, namely, a choga, with all kinds of embroideries and symbols depicted upon it. (2) The place of installation to be down Kingsway so as to permit large number of people to be present as on 26 January (3) A variety of prayers—Hindu, Islamic, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jewish, Jain, and perhaps others, representing all the well-known religions of India. (4) The President-elect to spin and plant a tree. (5) A military parade.<sup>20</sup>

Nehru, however, was not interested in any ceremony of this kind. He made a clear distinction between the oath taking ceremony and the Republic Day. In a note to the cabinet, Nehru wrote:

‘I am rather doubtful of the desirability of two functions and I am inclined to think that the Presidential assumption of office should be a relatively simple affair . . . The pomp and circumstance should be kept for Republic Day, etc. . . . I do not at all like the idea of this ceremony taking place in Kingsway. I appreciate that the Durbar Hall in Rashtrapati Bhavan is too small and not wholly suited for this. I would suggest that the ceremony take

place in the Diwan-i-Khas or Diwan-Aam of the Red Fort. That provides an appropriate background and a much larger number of people can be present . . . a succession of prayers by followers of a variety of religions seems to me to be rather overdoing it and, therefore, inappropriate . . . I do not think there should be a military parade on this occasion. Nor do I think that tree planting or spinning would be suitable for the particular occasion. The new President might well plant a tree later.<sup>21</sup>

The oath taking ceremony of the president, which took place in the Parliament House, turned out to be a simple administrative affair. However, this episode offered a new meaning to the symbolic status of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, though rather indirectly. Nehru’s reluctance to make the oath taking ceremony a public event clearly indicates his adherence to evolve an India specific republicanism, a parliamentary form of democracy, with an indirectly elected head of the state. In this institutional framework, the election of the president, his/her oath taking (and for that matter, the members of the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha) do not acquire any constitutive centrality; rather these acts symbolise the mechanism by which a political system is supposed to function. On the other hand, the Republic Day celebrations indicate the philosophical ideas that determine the institutional set-up of a political system. The placing of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in this schema was very crucial. Although this place eventually came to be known as the residence of the head of the state in the mid-1950s, the figure



of the president was always recognised as an elected inhabitant of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.<sup>22</sup> This intentional impermanency symbolically underlined the evolving Indian republicanism of the 1950s—the fact that the Rashtrapati Bhavan is inherited by electorates (read public) as a national building to install an elected (though indirectly) head of the state. Perhaps that was the clear message that came out from 1952 general election.

## RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN AND ITS CONTEMPORARY PUBLICS

The Rashtrapati Bhavan's public character as an assertive marker of republicanism is inextricably linked to the story of postcolonial Indian democracy. In fact, the trajectories of democratic politics continued to shape the Rashtrapati Bhavan and its publics in later years. For instance, the establishment of the Padma Awards in the mid-1950s increased the ceremonial status of this place; and, at the same time, introduced the notion of an awarded public: the public that was recognised for its commitment and contribution to the nation building project. Similarly, the changes introduced in the official rituals of the Republic Day in the early 1970s (such as the installation of the Amar Jawan Jyoti at India Gate) also effected the symbolic status of this building.<sup>23</sup>

The security discourse, however, has been the most determining feature of postcolonial Indian politics that re-characterised the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a public monument. Although the security of politicians has always been an important administrative concern in India, it never became a serious issue in the early years after Independence despite Mahatma Gandhi's assassination in 1948.<sup>24</sup> Leaders like Nehru and Prasad did not pay close attention to security. Even the President's Bodyguard (PBG) acquired mainly a symbolic status.<sup>25</sup> However, the crisis of democratic politics that found violent manifestations in the 1980s, transformed the question of security into a political anxiety. The assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 was a turning point in this regard.

The discourse of security had a direct impact on the administration of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a public building. Like the Parliament House or the secretariat, the Rashtrapati Bhavan has also become a protected site. The access of public inside this symbol of republicanism was to be decided by the security establishment.<sup>26</sup> This trust deficit was also manifested in

*Aerial view of the Republic Day celebrations of 2015 when President Pranab Mukherjee received President Barack Obama of the USA (Photo by Narendra Bisht)*









the official celebrations of the Republic Day. The 1985 Republic Day Parade is a revealing example in this regard. According to the *Hindustan Times*:

‘This year’s Republic Day parade was a triumph of security . . . breathing a sigh of relief at the end of the parade, a senior police officer said “this is the beginning of a new era. *Ab shaan se jaan ki zyaada parvah hain* (now life is more important than pomp)” . . . President Zail Singh did not . . . unfurl the tricolour for the National Salute. An army officer pulled the string while the President was placed on the relative safety of a raised podium, set well back from the parade route . . . With the bullet proof glass covering the sides, the platform left the President exposed only to attack from the front . . . All these went through three cordons of thorough checking, including metal detectors, personal frisking and scrutiny of invitations.’<sup>27</sup>

The political discourse of security seems to offer a new meaning of the public, of the public as a security threat. This re-conceptualisation of the public was based on the assumption that the public as a collective entity might be used by a few enemies of the state for political or terrorist violence. Since it is not possible for the security establishment to identify the miscreants/troublemakers, it is advisable to draw a clear dividing line between the public and the sphere of the state. This administrative imagination of the public was significantly different. The distinction that the postcolonial state evoked in the 1950s between the informed public that was participating in the nation building project and the public which was to be prepared for the task of nation building through education and training actually became irrelevant. Instead, the public presence was envisaged in terms of crowd management.

It does not, however, mean that the Rashtrapati Bhavan ceases to function as a public monument. While it is true that the conventional symbolism associated with it as an icon of republicanism has started shrinking, the success of Indian democracy has opened up new modes in which this building is re-envisioned. The coalition politics of 1990s, for instance, not merely strengthened the institution of the president but also redefined the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a site of political negotiations. In recent years, the public debates on mercy petitions; the debates on federalism and the recent public protests of 2013 at India Gate seem to unpack the commemorative values of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a public monument: a site where the contestations of democratic politics are celebrated. Indeed, there is a need to study this contemporary public of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in a systematic way because it not merely rejects the imposed meanings of public as a security threat but also points towards the popular perception of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a living symbol of Indian republicanism.

FACING PAGE. The President’s Bodyguard escort the cavalcade of President Pranab Mukherjee and the chief guest, President François Hollande of France, 2016







1 It is important to note that the public buildings like the Rashtrapati Bhavan are never described as a *monument* of any kind in the official postcolonial discourse. The web portal of the government of India, for instance, describes the Rashtrapati Bhavan: 'the official residence of the President of India, is an imposing edifice located at the west end of the Rajpath in New Delhi with the India gate at the opposite end. Designed by Edwin Landseer Lutyens, this palatial building was the erstwhile residence of the British Viceroy. Few official residential premises of the State Heads in the world will match the Rashtrapati Bhavan in terms of its size, vastness and its magnificence': [http://www.archive.india.gov.in/knowindia/culture\\_heritage.php?id=60](http://www.archive.india.gov.in/knowindia/culture_heritage.php?id=60). This kind of portrayal is not entirely unintentional. Officially, as well as legally, a monument is recognised as an old building (more than 100 years or more) or site commemorating a person or event and/or a structure of historical, archaeological and national importance. The Rashtrapati Bhavan, in this sense, cannot be treated as a monument because it does not mark any historic rupture. On the contrary, the Rashtrapati Bhavan has a very different commemorative value: it is presented as an administrative/political site to commemorate the postcolonial Indian nationhood. Precisely in this sense, I use the term *public monument*. For a discussion on the idea of a monument in official legal sense, see Hilal Ahmed: *Muslim Political Discourse in Postcolonial India: Monuments, Memory Contestation* (Delhi/Oxon: Routledge, 2014), chapter 3.

2 I am not keen to use the expression 'Lutyens' Delhi' as it does not capture the manner in which the buildings of the New Delhi were perceived in the 1950s. My respondents also describe the British built Delhi as 'New Delhi'.

3 For a detailed discussion on this transformation, see the previous chapter.

4 Nehru's discussion with Mountbatten on the Indian flag on 15 August is a revealing example in this regard. In his final report to about the 15 August 1947 ceremony to the secretary of state in London, Mountbatten also noted this point: 'At 6 p.m. the great event of the day was to take place—the salutation of the new Dominion flag. This programme had originally included a ceremonial lowering of the Union Jack: but when I discussed this with Nehru he entirely agreed that this was a day they wanted everybody to be happy, and if the lowering of the Union Jack in any way offended British susceptibilities, he would certainly see that it did not take place': IOR: L/PO/6/123, BL, <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpregion/asia/india/indianindependence/transfer/transfer6>.

5 *Transfer of Power* was an official term used by the British state to describe the ceremonial events of 14–15 August 1947; it also refers to the multi-volume documentation of the process of the transfer of power.

6 Sudipta Kaviraj elaborates this distinction between the public and the crowd. He argues that the meanings of the term *public* changed quite considerably in postcolonial India. This distinction, I believe, is useful to understand the modes in which the Rashtrapati Bhavan could be interpreted as a public monument. See Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Filth and the Public Sphere: Concepts and Practices about Space in Calcutta', *Public Culture*, 10(1) (Fall, 1997), 83–113.

7 IOR: L/PO/6/123, BL, <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpregion/asia/india/indianindependence/transfer/transfer6/>.

8 Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. 5, Thursday, 14 August 1947: <http://164.100.47.132/LssNew/constituent/vol5p1.html>.

9 The nationalist elite, especially Rajendra Prasad, were very keen to establish a link between this building and everyday life of Indian communities. In his official correspondence, Prasad writes: 'I have taken another step to make the Rashtrapati Bhavan more Indian in appearance in its inside than it is at present. For about a year I have been considering how to replace the furnishings in the numerous rooms by products of Indian handicraft, and with that object there has been correspondence between my Secretariat and the State governments and I am glad that many of the states have agreed to furnish a whole room or to supply us with articles in which they specialize so that we might utilize them in the best way possible in furnishing our rooms here'. Choudhary, *Dr. Rajendra Prasad*, Vol. 15, 126.

10 The ideals of republicanism and democracy were used creatively to build a link between these two publics. This might be the reason why Nehru decided to accommodate schoolchildren from Delhi in the official celebration programme. According to newspaper reports, sweets were distributed in Delhi's schools on the occasion of Independence Day and students were given a badge depicting the tricolour flag of India. In fact, an informal interaction was organised with schoolchildren before the main ceremony. This information is based on various informal discussions with those residents of Old Delhi, who actually participated in the celebration on 15 August 1947 as schoolchildren.

11 For an elaborate discussion on the organisation and structure of this exhibition at Government House, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Instituting the Nation in Art,' In *Wages of Freedom*, ed. by Partha Chatterjee (New Delhi: Oxford, 1997).

12 For an excellent discussion on the formation of the National Museum, see Kavita Singh, 'The Museum is National', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3/4, India: A National Culture? (Winter 2002–Spring 2003), 176–96.

13 The establishment of the National Museum in New Delhi was, in fact, also an unfinished British project, see *Ibid.*, 185.

14 Prime Minister's Message, National Museum, GOI, Delhi, 1960.

15 Location of the National Museum, SWJN, II, Vol. 9. As discussed in the previous chapter, many presidents including R. Venkataraman, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Pranab Mukherjee have looked to sustain this vision of exhibitions and museums at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

16 Mitter and Ahuja, eds., *The Arts and Interiors of Rashtrapati Bhavan*, 94–99.

17 This was also not a new phenomenon. Political education was an important aspect of nationalist politics. There had always been an emphasis on discipline and organisation, especially in Gandhian politics of protests. Nehru's expectations from the National Museum to function as an educational entity, in this sense, were not merely an evocation of certain lofty ideals of nation building; rather, these were rooted in the political context of the 1940s.

18 Government House renamed as the Rashtrapati Bhavan in 1950. According to the Rashtrapati Bhavan's official website: 'That "empire in stone" and the perpetual Durbar was transformed to be the permanent



institution of democracy on 26th January 1950 when Dr. Rajendra Prasad became the first President of India and occupied this building to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of India. It was from that day that this building was renamed as Rashtrapati Bhavan—the President's House'. <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/overview-of-rashtrapati-bhavan.htm>.

19 In later years, the route of the parade was carefully worked out. The Republic Day Parade followed a route that went through Prince's Place, Curzon Road, Connaught Circus till the junction of Irwin Road and then turning right towards Connaught Circus, Minto Road, Circular Road, Delhi Gate, Fair Bazar. While the mechanised infantry would enter Chandni Chowk, the marching column would turn off at Khas Road into the Red Fort. The route was designed to ensure that the public from both New and Old Delhi could participate in the event.

20 SWJN, II, Vol. 17, 1 November 1951–31 March 1952.

21 Ibid.

22 For an interesting discussion on this point, see the previous chapter.

23 After the 1972 war, the Amar Jawan Jyoti was installed at the India Gate to mark the contribution of the unknown soldiers. This move was crucial because the commemorative capacity of the India Gate was evoked to accommodate the prime minister in the official rituals of the Republic Day. For a detailed discussion, see Hilal Ahmed, 'An 'Official' Memory of India: Monuments, Memorials and Samadhis as Political Texts', in *Critical Studies in Politics: Exploring Sites, Selves, Power*, eds Nivedita Menon, Sanjay Pulshikar and Aditya Nigam, (New Delhi: Oriental Black Swan, 2014), 418–53.

24 Former ADCs of the Rashtrapati Bhavan recall a time when the Rashtrapati Bhavan was an informal space where officers had their friends over in the ADC suites in the north wing. Such personal guests would park their cars near the fountain in the North Court, unlike the contemporary period where the North Court is guarded by armed guards. Interview with Alok Chandola.

25 In the 1960s, the president's convoy included a motorcyclist as a pilot. The former ADC Ranbir Talwar remembers the familiar site of a famous dancing policeman who was positioned at the crossroads of Raisina Hill. Here he would conduct traffic as if he was conducting a band. On seeing the president's vehicle make its way down Raisina Hill, the policeman would ceremoniously stop the traffic until the president passed by. Interview with Ranbir Talwar.

26 While the president's security is the responsibility of the Delhi Police, it is the office of the military secretary (MSP) that lays out the blueprint for the president's travel. Major Shobhit Pandey, ADC to President Pranab Mukherjee until recently, mentions that the MSP's office decides the arrangement of cars for the president's travel. The decisions taken by the military staff is executed by the police on the ground. Interview with Major Shobhit Pandey (New Delhi: 10 March 2016). He served as ADC from 2012 to 2016 to first President Pratibha Devisingh Patil and then President Pranab Mukherjee.

27 'Tight Security at Republic Day Parade', *The Hindustan Times*, 28 January 1985.



ABOVE. Presentation of the Arjuna Awards by President S. Radhakrishnan, 8 July 1966 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)

BELOW. Countless citizens visit the Rashtrapati Bhavan to pay their respects as President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed lies in state, 12 February 1977

NEXT PAGE. The colonial bungalow of the comptroller of the household (Photo by Ram Rahman)













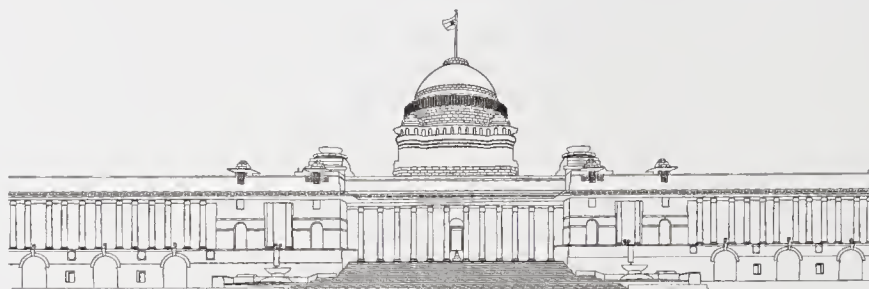




SECTION II

# RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN TODAY





## CHAPTER 5

# THE PRESIDENTIAL ESTABLISHMENT



Surajit Sarkar

### LOCATING MEMORY

The next two chapters deal with contemporary representations of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a living site of memory, as foregrounding the relations between home and the state, and as an emblem of change through constant rediscovery. Located inevitably in history, it, however, emerged mainly out of recent encounters with a large number of people associated with the Rashtrapati Bhavan today. Previous documentation of the Rashtrapati Bhavan has tended to focus on images of architectural scale and grandeur, arguably missing the series of interconnected networks, both formal and informal, and the stories that belong there. It is the mix of formality and informality, somewhat like that which exist in the traditions of large rambling joint families, that gives a unique identity to the place. The tendencies to 'commemorate', glorify and celebrate as well as raise doubts and concerns are part of any ethnographic project of this scale, and these chapters are no exception. There is a constant swing from the individual to the collective experience, with all accompanying tendencies of selective memorisations and function-based narrations. However, rather than seeing these processes as a limitation, such direct experiences invest the effort with a unique advantage and what emerges is a picture with multiple colours and perspectives, all of which contribute to make life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan a significant lived experience.

This chapter deals with the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a house—for the President of India, and for a whole cortege of administrative staff, from the secretary to the president, to the range of staff who live within its grand ramparts. Both as a family home for the president and the foremost office of the country with the attached township that services it, the Rashtrapati Bhavan complex or the President's Estate has reflected the changing socio-economic environment of the country, albeit heightened by the contributions of its 'first' citizen.

The network of memories of the Rashtrapati Bhavan is complex as it includes both the long- and short-term experiences of the different cadres of residents. It includes the intensely felt experiences of those officials (beginning with the presidents) that serve a tenure there and briefly make a home of it along with their families. They tend to remember their temporary residence in India's best address as halcyon days and their experience is that much more heightened for it. A senior official at the Rashtrapati Bhavan once emphasised that the oldest memories of work are available with the permanent staff. These members of the presidential household, their tenure unaffected by changing presidencies, had observations of life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, which draw from a much longer experience than their seniors. But it is also true that the unique nature of this site comes together when different perspectives interweave with each other. Intimacy and informality coexist alongside efficiency and control at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The ways in which people navigate





*Storekeeper Chander Mohan takes stock of the colonial crockery in the reserves*



this contrast is at the centre of any attempt to understand how residents make sense of the place.

President Pranab Mukherjee recalls an early encounter with the Rashtrapati Bhavan as an outsider, as a union minister: 'Because of the high alert announced following Indira Gandhi's assassination, the police in the city was in a chaos. When our car reached Rashtrapati Bhavan, the guards at the gate refused to allow us entry because we had no prior appointment with the president [Giani Zail Singh] and they had no instructions to let us in. Finally, P.C. Alexander [the principal secretary to the prime minister] got out of the car and shouted at them: "Do you not recognise the Home Minister and Finance Minister sitting in the back of the car?"' <sup>1</sup> Three decades later, he would become the 13th President of India in the culmination of a journey that brought him from 'the flicker of a lamp in a small Bengal village to the chandeliers of Delhi'.

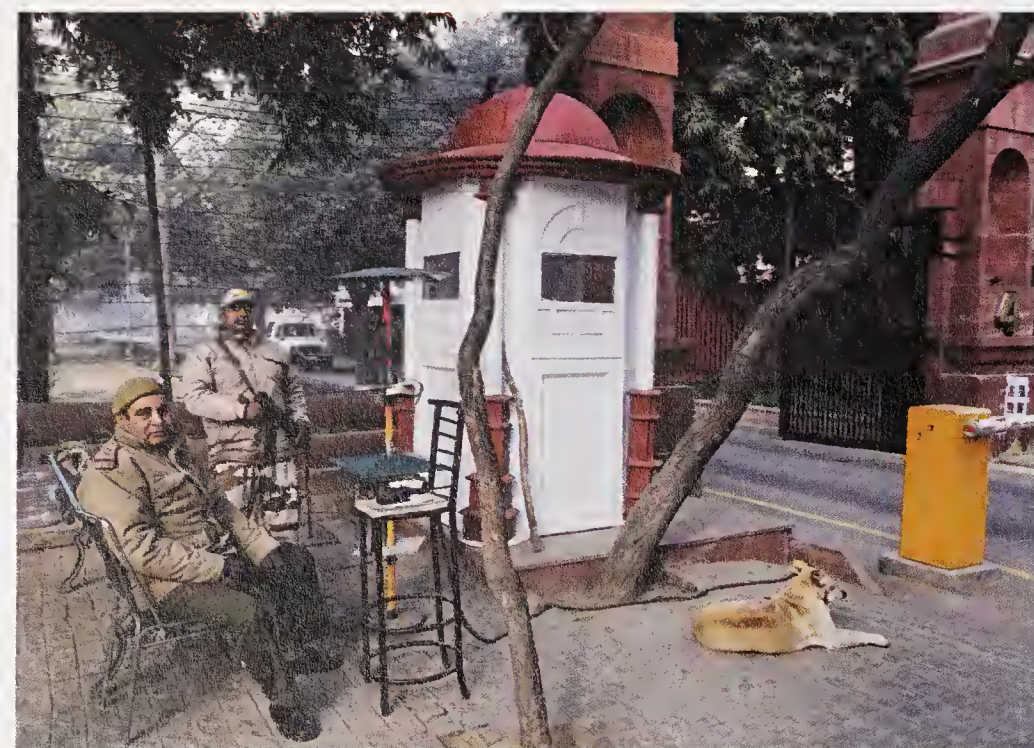
Although the president's daily routine consists of a number of hours spent in his study as his office and on public and social engagements, it also includes an early morning walk in the Mughal Garden and the hours he spends reading in the private study in the family wing. He is known to read and write in the private study before dinner and then before he retires. The Rashtrapati Bhavan is conducive to family life, with several facilities and activities to engage entire families. '[The president] loves nature and greenery, but doesn't have time now to do much of it himself. My mother [Suvra Mukherjee] was a keen gardener. She even planted some trees and flowering plants in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. These are really special to my dad and me', spoke Sharmishtha Mukherjee, the daughter of President Mukherjee, of their time at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. <sup>2</sup>

President Mukherjee's insistence on celebrating the birthdays of past presidents is a gesture of connecting with and commemorating a sense of the past. Many family members of erstwhile presidents attend and come back to visit the Rashtrapati Bhavan even after 30 years, sharing amusing stories and memorable anecdotes. President Pratibha Devisingh Patil was a special guest at the official functions to mark the fourth anniversary of the current presidency, the highlight of which was the inauguration of the

*TOP. The gardeners Suraj Dev, Veer Singh, Ashok Kumar and Somveer preparing garlands for festooning the Mughal Garden in preparation for an at-home garden party*

*BELOW. Security at one of the smaller gates of the Rashtrapati Bhavan*

*FACING PAGE. The baker Rakesh Vaish makes vol au vents in the Rashtrapati Bhavan kitchens. These snacks are one of many delicacies from the British period that continue to be served at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. An army of chefs, cooks and helpers is employed in the Rashtrapati Bhavan kitchens*













second part of the Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum complex, which relates the history of the presidency. The reunion of presidential ADCs in 2014 was another gesture made by the president to ensure that ties to the Rashtrapati Bhavan were maintained. One of the oldest former ADCs, who served under Governor General C. Rajagopalachari, Kirpal Singh, showed President Mukherjee an old photo of him with Rajaji, to which the president replied that the photo belongs in the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a historical memento and asked for a copy.<sup>3</sup>

Omita Paul, the secretary to the president, describes her initial feeling of awe at the grandeur of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. She describes her experience of heading the President's Secretariat as 'the best assignment of [her] career' and of living in the 'dreamland' of the estate as 'blissful'. She says that the sense of history at the site is palpable and exciting and that she feels part of it every time she walks in the corridor leading to her office.<sup>4</sup> To cite another instance to illustrate the sense of wonder, Captain Prashant Singh, the comptroller of the president's household, recalls his grown-up son's first reaction on his first visit to his parent's home on the estate: 'You live in heaven!'<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the perception of the place also factors in the awe that it inspires in outsiders at the prospect of working there. It follows that, as described by Sowar Jagdeep Singh from the President's Bodyguard (PBG), for the permanent staff of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, their position allows them to 'go home' to their family homes, home towns and villages with their head held high and narrate accounts of having seen various heads of states and dignitaries at close hand.

A home of this scale needs an institutional edifice that is both capable and committed to buttress it, to ensure smooth functioning. The senior officials emphasise the order and control that underlies the day-to-day functioning of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Every section of the building, from the culinary arts of the kitchens to the tulips in the gardens, or from the linen in the laundry to the old books in the library, forms a vital part of an intricate complex. Behind this tight grid is the idea of the presidency as paterfamilias, an employer imbued with the idea of orderly development, efficient work practice and includes the notion of providing for healthier living and working conditions for the tightly knit community. In the Rashtrapati Bhavan, this includes an environment designed to be aesthetically appealing with well-designed residences, parks, schools and libraries, along with social programmes, such as sporting events and cultural functions. These facilities in turn highlight the power of the office of the president, which, based on its vision, interests and actions, shapes the work environment and lifestyles of the employees to serve the presidential set-up. Let us examine the infrastructure and components of the administrative organisation of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, which integrate its multiple functions in India's first home.

*The senior butler Taufiquddin holds himself in readiness to receive the president on the morning of the Republic Day parade, 2016*

NEXT PAGE: The Committee Room (Photo by Joginder Singh)











## THE OFFICES OF THE RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

At first sight, it may appear that the Raj is re-enacted at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, surrounded as it is by ceremony. A closer look reveals that it is, in fact, run as an administrative centre. This administrative establishment includes a wide range of services, departments, duties and responsibilities that keeps both the monumental building and institution ticking. Indeed, many of these sections rarely share in the limelight on the Rashtrapati Bhavan as they go about their business quietly and efficiently. The officer in charge of horticulture, U.D. Kukreti, considers the bureaucracy at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as unique in the government system: 'Accountability and responsibility are important here. This is more than a government office. It combines history, traditions, grandeur and ceremony. Everything we do here reflects on the president.'<sup>6</sup> Thomas Mathew, the additional secretary to the president, summarises that there is no room for error here. 'Implementation [of ideas] is the key'.<sup>7</sup>

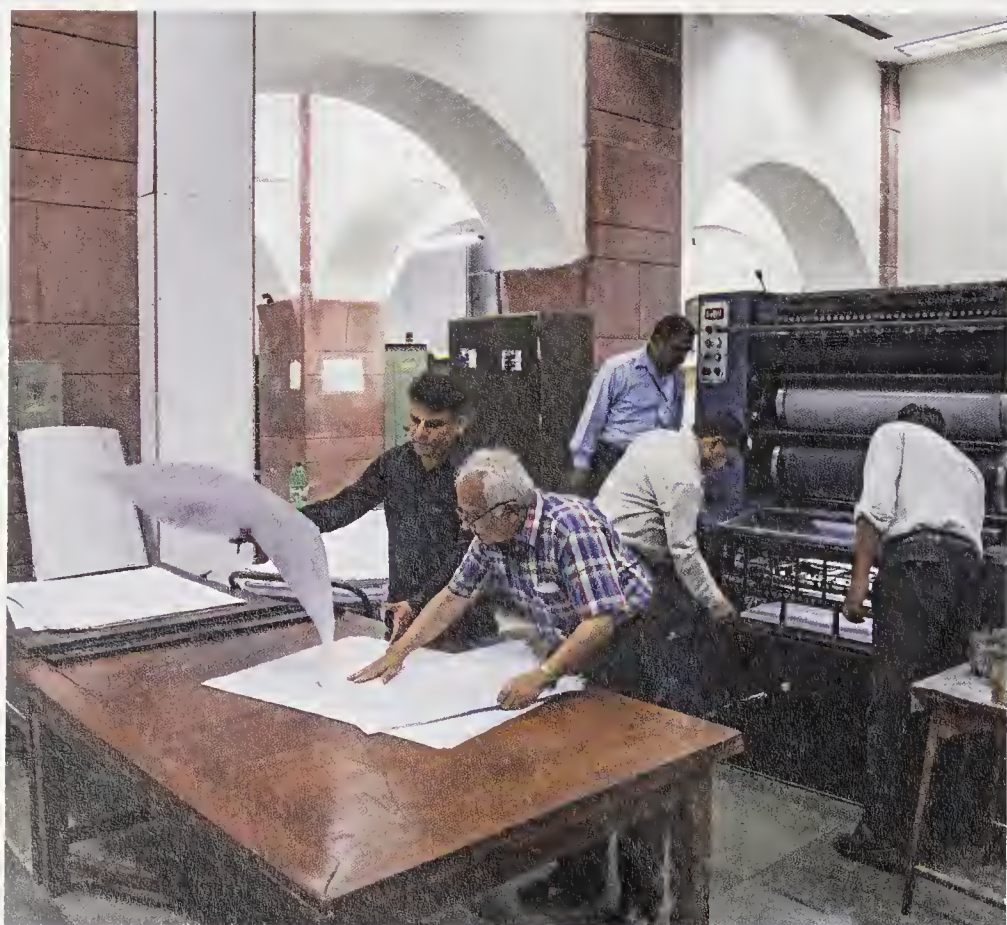
Since the early days of the Indian presidency, as its role has expanded, the administration has become more complex, leading to the establishment of numerous new posts and departments. At present, the President's Secretariat is headed by a secretary to the president assisted by an additional secretary. Joint secretaries manage all administrative matters, in addition to special tasks like press-public relations (including a press wing) and diplomatic engagements as the press and social secretaries respectively. A financial adviser, directors and officers-on-special-duty (OSDs) look into expenditure as well as different aspects of administration. The changes in the focus of different presidencies means that often, officers have to improvise and take on unexpected responsibilities. The social secretary, Gaitri Issar Kumar, draws, as befits the diplomatic adviser at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, from the Indian Foreign Service (IFS). However, she has also helped out with the initiative to restore the interiors of the main building to its historical glory.<sup>8</sup> Siddharth Sharma, the internal financial adviser, felt unprepared when he was asked to take charge of Indra Dhanush, the cultural series at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, but since then relishes his role as an impresario and handpicks eminent artistes to perform in front of the president every month.<sup>9</sup> As President Mukherjee placed emphasis on higher education, research and innovation, an OSD from the Indian Economic Services (IES), Shakil Alam, was dedicated to reference and research, an assignment he finds intellectually fulfilling and marvels at the personal interest taken by the president in the cause.<sup>10</sup>

*Head Librarian S.N.S Prakash goes through the collection of rare books at the Rashtrapati Bhavan*











Deputy directors, under-secretaries and section officers assist the senior officers in discharging their duties. Parallel to the secretariat is the President's Office, including private secretaries to the president to look after the direct work of the president. It is worth noting that, although some departments such as the Tour, Establishment and Household Sections are headed by senior military officials, they are run largely by a civilian staff. The presidential establishment includes a doctor and a clinic. The present physician, Dr Mohsin Wali, has served presidents since R. Venkataraman, and was appointed the youngest ever physician to a president at 33 years.<sup>11</sup>

The current presidency's recent initiatives of greater public access to the Rashtrapati Bhavan has led to the establishment of new departments or enhanced the role of existing ones to look after outreach and engagement. These include a Visitors' Management Cell, Art Section, Record Room, Sanitary Section, to name a few. Anupam Nag, the reception officer, mentions that since the website enabling online registration for visits was launched on 1 January 2013, the number of applicants for visiting the complex on the weekends has increased to three lakhs in three years owing to the online system in addition to the offline process of registration.<sup>12</sup> Such public tours and visits have been streamlined by the setting up of 'e-governance'.<sup>13</sup>

Alongside these modern innovations are venerable institutions such as the library of old and rare books that is still housed in Lutyens' custom-made room with its striking floor pattern of yellow Jaisalmer stone and white and grey marble. According to the librarian, S.N.S Prakash, the library holds some 4,000 rare books. 'While some are gifts, many are purchases by the library, which is diligent in stocking biographies and updated copies of the constitution, besides speeches of past presidents.'<sup>14</sup> The library is especially dear to President Mukherjee, himself a voracious reader. As the press secretary, also in charge of the library, Venu Rajamony explained: 'While presidents have made use of this library before, few visited it . . . That is, until now'.<sup>15</sup>

The Photo Section is another historical institution of the Rashtrapati Bhavan as it documents and maintains the records from all the presidencies. Samar Mondal, the chief photographer, has been chronicling the Rashtrapati Bhavan for 29 years and is a treasure trove of memories. He remembers President R

Venkataraman's enthusiasm for photography, President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's idiosyncrasies as well as his warmth. 'Sometimes President Kalam would call me in the middle of the night to find a picture. He would be waiting for me in his apartment and would offer me peanuts the moment I reached. "Mondalji, have your food," he would say.'<sup>16</sup>

There also exist departments (and sites) which rarely receive public attention but are fundamental to the machinery of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The basement of the north wing includes a highly active printing press. Here invitations, menu cards and, most importantly, table plans for banquets are churned out. A diagram of the seating arrangement, strictly in accordance with protocol, is distributed to each guest in advance. Interestingly, until 1950, even budget papers were printed at this press. That is, until the papers were leaked once!<sup>17</sup> Also unique is the section handling presidential tours. As such trips have to be planned to clockwork precision, the Tour Section has to be highly efficient. It is also responsible for setting up the presidential retreats in Secunderabad-Hyderabad and Mashobra-Shimla in preparation for the president and his entourage.<sup>18</sup> At the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the senior officers on postings collaborate with the permanent staff, civilian and military colleagues work together to conduct one of the most accomplished administrative machineries of India.

*FACING PAGE ABOVE. Security personnel enjoy a brief moment of respite and pore over the day's news in the Rashtrapati Bhavan reception*

*FACING BELOW LEFT. The basement of the Rashtrapati Bhavan houses one of the government of India presses. Earlier, this printing press was reserved solely for the viceregal office to ensure secrecy of the published reports and documents*

*FACING BELOW RIGHT. The physician to the president, Dr Mohsin Wali, waits in the ADCs room*



## CEREMONIAL AT THE RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

One of the traditions that has been carried forward from the colonial period is the presence of a military establishment at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. It reinforces the role of the president as the supreme commander of the armed forces. The military serves the important purpose of lending splendour to the ceremonies of state and the military staff are also a key component of the President's Secretariat. The military establishment include such senior officers as the military secretary to the president (MSP), the deputy military secretary (DMSP) and the comptroller of the household (CPH), besides five young officers as aides-de-camps (ADCs). It also includes the household cavalry of the president, the PBG, headed by a commandant, also the commanding officer (CO), assisted by a second-in-command (2IC) cum adjutant. The other army unit at the Rashtrapati Bhavan is the ceremonial guard battalion. With the exception of the PBG, which is permanently based at the bodyguard lines in the President's Estate, the military officers (including those of the PBG) as well as the infantry battalion come on postings to the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Through the colonial period and well into the post-Independence period, the military secretary used to oversee the running of the estate. However, as the role of the president has taken in more and more public interactions and state visits within the country and abroad, the focus of the military establishment has shifted to handling presidential travel and ceremonial responsibilities. The military secretary and his deputy are thus responsible for the ceremonial conduct of the president, ceremonial events at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and state visits, bringing the Tour and Invitation Sections under their care. As the Indian state has increasingly become complex following Independence, all these responsibilities involve liaising with and coordinating between numerous agencies. The comptroller is responsible for the smooth functioning of the presidential household from the cleanliness and sanitation to organising state banquets.<sup>19</sup> Although the military secretary, the deputy military secretary and the comptroller have at different times been drawn from the different wings of the military, by and large, the military secretary is drawn from the army, his deputy from the air force and the comptroller from the navy.<sup>20</sup>

The ADCs similarly consist of at least one representative of the air force and one from the navy, the majority from the army. The ADCs have traditionally been the constant companions of the president as one ADC is always 'on call' to attend to the president from the time s/he wakes up to the moment s/he retires for the day. They are responsible for the conduct of the president in keeping with protocol and even stepping in to determine conduct vis-à-vis the president, that is, the manner in which, say,

the president is approached. These young officers, resplendent in their ceremonial uniform but striking even in their daily uniform attached with aiguillettes, distinguish the persona of the president. The ADC is, in the words of Major Shobhit Pandey, a former ADC to President Mukherjee, 'what a shadow is to a man'.<sup>21</sup> On ceremonial occasions, the president is escorted by a pair of ADCs, the military secretary and his deputy, and the commandant and the second-in-command of the PBG.

The PBG performs mounted and dismounted parades on state occasions, the sight of the bodyguard in their stylish ceremonial uniforms lending élan and dignity to presidential proceedings.<sup>22</sup> Ceremonial splendour is also added to the Rashtrapati Bhavan by the ceremonial guard in their dress uniforms as they mount guard at different locations in front of the main building and perform the changing of the guard. Every three years, a 'bravest of the brave' regiment is rewarded for exemplary service with this prestigious posting in Delhi. In 1939, a British visitor to the Viceroy's House had exulted in the sight of the 1/5th Maratha Light Infantry mounting guard: 'It was a splendid sight and, so exact was the precision of every movement, that it might have been one of the Guards Regiments carrying through the same ceremonial in the fore-court of Buckingham Palace. But picture the difference . . . picture the brilliant burning sunshine, blazing down out of a cloudless sky, and throwing its dazzling light over the whole ceremonial scene and colourful setting, with the band playing under the trees on one side of the avenue, that is an impression I will never forget of Changing of the Guard at the Viceroy's House.'<sup>23</sup> The changing of the guard every Saturday, these days performed by the Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry, in the entrance to the Rashtrapati Bhavan (just before the Jaipur Column) is no less an evocative sight. The difference is that while the changing of the guard used to be a routine internal exercise of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, it is now a popular public event under the current presidency.

*CLOCKWISE. Major General Anil Khosla, military secretary, inspecting the President's Bodyguard lines, escorted by the commandant of the PBG, Colonel Dhiraj Chengappa*

*The three wings of the armed forces are represented by the military secretary, Major General Anil Khosla, deputy military secretary, Group Captain Sanjeev Sethi, and the comptroller of the household, Captain Prashant Singh. Seen here in their summer ceremonial uniform in the state corridor of the Rashtrapati Bhavan*

*Colonel R. V. Dhumal, veterinary officer from the Remount and Veterinary Corps with the PBG, treating a guard dog at the 44 Military Veterinary Hospital, which is not just responsible for providing medical care to the horses with the PBG but also fulfils the role of the in-house veterinary clinic in the President's Estate*

*The current presidency has opened up the changing of the guard ceremony every Saturday to the general public*













An institution deserving special mention is the in-house veterinarian. The Remount and Veterinary Corps (RVC) maintains an establishment, the 44 Military Veterinary Hospital, commanded by a veterinary officer (VO), to primarily look after the horses of the PBG but also to attend to the other animals on the estate as well as referred to it.<sup>24</sup> The VO, Colonel R.V. Dhumal, gives a heartening account of not just treating pet dogs and cats on the estate but also the 'wild' animals and birds such as peacocks, deer and monkeys.<sup>25</sup>

## THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

The basement of the main building is often referred to as the 'engine room of the ship', housing the various service departments of the Household Section catering to the presidential establishment, including the kitchens and the laundry. The responsibilities of the Household section range from deciding the menu for state banquets to the changing of bed linen, from the supply of liquor to foreign guests in the privacy of their salons (in the otherwise liquor-free household) to the maintenance of the entire complex. The office of the comptroller of the household operates in a flexible mode, adopting various approaches with the single-minded objective of converting an idea into reality in the shortest possible time.<sup>26</sup> Alongside this efficiency exists an informal network of skills and knowledge, as older retainers take younger recruits under their wing. In a manner similar to the *ustad-shagird* apprenticeship traditions, such knowledge sharing makes possible the smooth functioning of various household departments. As the additional comptroller of the household (ACPH), Anita Bimal, explains, 'there are cooks, halwais, household attendants, room attendants, silver polishers [or SCMs, who wash the plates and polish the silverware]. These people haven't received any training. They have learnt through generations and have had on-job training by seeing each other. It's been their tradition that makes it unique and different.'<sup>27</sup> These informal apprenticeships were created within the working environs of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and made sure that, as recalled by a former long-serving butler, Karim Ullah, 'the young butlers learned the craft from their seniors, just as the junior chefs in the kitchen looked up to the master chef to learn their culinary craft'.<sup>28</sup> This aspect of nesting the informal within the formal came up in a conversation with the additional comptroller when describing the working atmosphere as similar to that of large family house. Recognising and appreciating the work of the individual is important in this milieu.

*Cutlery and other silver settings embossed with the national emblem being polished by the silver polishers-cum-masalchis Gaurav Kumar and Mohit Kumar*







Visitors at the Rashtrapati Bhavan are invariably greeted by a liveried butler with a plate of snacks, tea and coffee. 'Indian cuisine is quite popular and the Rashtrapati Bhavan kitchens shoulder the responsibility of showcasing the best of it to a large number of Indian and foreign dignitaries who visit the Rashtrapati Bhavan. They expect to taste the very best of Indian cuisine at the office and residence of the President of India,' noted the press secretary, Venu Rajamony.<sup>29</sup> Behind the structures of India's food diplomacy through the Rashtrapati Bhavan kitchens, lie the chefs, cooks and butlers of the household. Even those who are not directly recruited, drawing instead from the ranks of the hospitality industry, have to (re) learn the ropes on the job in this unique setting. The personnel behind the soft diplomacy practised believe, like executive chef Montu Saini does, that 'at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, there is no second chance, elsewhere, while a customer's disappointment can be compensated with a complimentary drink or dinner, there are no such opportunities here'.<sup>30</sup>

The reward lies in the prestige associated with working in the presidential establishment, as explained by the head butler, M.S. Rawat, who also reminisces about presidential solicitousness.<sup>31</sup> He remembers that President Pratibha Devisingh Patil would often inquire after his family. However, as touched as he was by such courtesies, protocol ensured that his responses would be limited to quick ones for fear of holding up the president's routine. The unobtrusive butlers waiting at the dining table developed a silent language of signals. 'A swift flick of our hands to our throat' indicated when the next course had to be served or the table cleared,' recalls Karim Ullah.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, once the seating plan for dinner is finalised, a display of two flowers in front of a plate indicates that the guest seated there will, exceptionally, have only fruits. One flower in front of a plate indicates a vegetarian guest.<sup>33</sup>

Related to such stories are the examples of kitchen and tableware from the viceregal period that have been on display in the different Kitchen Museums, the original one by President Kalam and the reinvented one (part of the new museum complex) by President Mukherjee. The museum was first established after President Kalam had asked for the basement to be cleared, and it was during this exercise that antique crockery, dating back to the colonial era and used by the viceroys, was discovered. 'I have spent two years in the basement retrieving objects and classifying them,' remembers K.T. Ravindran, the designer of the original museum, so that they could be 'displayed sequentially starting from food preparation, cooking, serving, dining, post-dining as well as equipment for outdoor picnics'.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, the stories of those who served in the viceregal kitchens—the insiders, who can chronicle the undersides of history—are not so evident in these recreated spaces.

One of the secrets of the Rashtrapati Bhavan is the service tunnel that connects the north and south wings of the main building. It connects the laundry to the linen room and is used by the large hand trolleys which carry fresh and dirty clothes, linen and furnishings to and from their sites of use. Located in the northern edge of the main building, the underground laundry is equipped with a range of machines, the oldest operational machine acquired 50 years ago at the time of President Zakir Husain, while the latest is a couple of years old. Recognisable by its noise and activity, this mechanised zone requires nimble hands and alert minds to keep the machines going around the clock. The head of the laundry, Mohammad Ahmad, feels that the skills required at the laundry are no less than those required in the civil services as 'both require dedication and a good memory'.<sup>35</sup>

Although the location of the laundry in its corner of the basement might lead one to feel that it is a marginal site within the grand design of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, it comes as a surprise to discover that various presidents and members of their families have actually visited it. Vimala Sharma, the wife of President Shankar Dayal Sharma, is remembered in the laundry as someone who was interested in finding out about the various machines and their functions. The laundry staff also remember the sudden visits of President Kalam while he was strolling around the estate.<sup>36</sup> President Patil's presidency is remembered as the time when the laundry was upgraded.

The 21 workers presently at the laundry, 19 people for washing and pressing alone, organise 8000 individual pieces of cloth every day. Newcomers at the laundry begin working on 'napkins' and 'bed sheets', taking on clothes with complex cuts and intricate folds gradually.<sup>37</sup> There are no holidays at the laundry and a minimal number of staff is always on duty. As the laundry chief, Noor Mohammad, states: 'There is no other laundry in the world quite like ours. From the linen of the presidential family to the clothes of the foreign guests, we attend to all their needs'.<sup>38</sup> The laundry is indeed a well-oiled machine known for its meticulous organisation and dedicated staff. It is no wonder that the post-retirement aspirations include joining a hotel as a manager (and not a launderer) as the work they have been doing for years is 'five-star hotel quality work'.<sup>39</sup>

*FACING PAGE, ABOVE. Dinesh Lama and Kuldeep Singh from the naval jazz band practise for the many banquets and receptions that the band provides live music at (Photo by Dheeraj Paul)*

*FACING PAGE, BELOW. Gaurav Kumar, the silver polisher-cum-masalchi, gingerly takes out the gravy bowls from the crockery store room located in the basement of the Rashtrapati Bhavan*











## THE VISTAS OF RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

The gardens of the estate are famed for their splendour. Successive presidents right from the first have noted that they should be looked after by properly trained gardeners, who in turn should go on to train others.<sup>40</sup> Gardeners remember President Husain's interest in the gardens of Rashtrapati Bhavan even today.<sup>41</sup> His granddaughter, Niloufer, recollects how 'at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the malis have always kept a very good garden, which is open to the people. President Husain took special interest, and the malis remember that he used to enjoy each and every flower and come and ask them about it. He used to ask little things about the garden and try and improve on some colour scheme and give ideas, so the gardeners felt wanted.'<sup>42</sup>

President Venkataraman recalls in his memoirs: 'I had flower beds raised facing the sit out so that the guests sipping coffee from the verandah would have the pleasant sight of blooming flowers.'<sup>43</sup> Recalling his meeting with President Kalam at Rashtrapati Bhavan, A.K. Singh of the Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants says: 'The herbal garden was initiated in 2002 during his tenure. My job was to identify the place and its layout, and ensure the delivery and plantation of the saplings.'<sup>44</sup> The scientist-president remained closely involved with the project, and a legend among the gardeners has it that many years after demitting office, President Kalam was asked if he missed his walks in the Mughal Garden. In reply, he is supposed to have said that the garden was in his memory and he did not have to be greedy about being physically present there.

There is a track that connects the golf course to the tennis court past trees that could be as old as 100 years. An OSD with President Mukherjee, Suresh Yadav, vividly describes this path: 'Many times when I take that route I feel like I am walking through history. It makes me feel that there is something here which might not exist anywhere else. Once, a visiting painter from Manipur depicted those trees as some form of a spirit. Since I saw those

PREVIOUS PAGE. *The viceregal picnic basket*

*Malis rest under the shade of the banyan tree. The avenues of the President's Estate are lined with planned rows of indigenous and exotic trees (Photo by Narendra Bisht)*















paintings, this path has become even more special.<sup>45</sup> The grounds and gardens have, indeed, been an integral part of the experience of past and present residents of the estate, inspiring them and inscribing their memories. Rajaji found solace in its gardens and flowers, as he noted: 'I have never before possessed this wealth, but now that I had it for a time I feel sad when I see the little things fade and wither before their harsh father, the sun.'<sup>46</sup> 'In all my 20 years of service, this was the first time our family was living on a ground floor. We have now made a kitchen garden, and my wife is fond of gardening. She has been very creative and developed horticulture models with stones and flowerbeds and all at the outside of the entrance of the house. Now many houses on the street have done the same, and it looks really inspiring.'<sup>47</sup>

Besides being located in written texts like memoirs, diaries, letters, emails and more, memories are also carried by word of mouth and these in time often take the shape of folklore. One such 'story' was related by the gardeners as they explained the seasonal planting of the flowers, so that they bloomed in time for the two annual grand receptions hosted by the president in the Mughal Garden every year, one to mark Republic Day on 26 January and the other on Independence Day on 15 August. Going over their schedule and worrying about the flowers blooming on time even as they discussed their worldview,<sup>48</sup> they asked the question, '*Mughal Garden ke layout ke baarey mein kabhie socha hain kya?*' (Ever wondered about the layout of the Mughal Gardens?).<sup>49</sup> They related a fascinating lore around the gardens, of its flowering beds and pathways mapping Lutyen's Delhi in miniature, with the fountain in the centre representing India Gate and the movement towards the forecourt replicating the movement towards Vijay Chowk. The gardeners are appreciative of innovations intended to diversify and improve production. A mali, Niamat Ullah, pointed out the bright green sprouts of coriander in the Dalikhana with pride as products of recent experiments with organic farming as fertilisers are being replaced with compost treated in the state-of-the-art sewage plant.<sup>50</sup>

*The President's Estate is dominated by an immaculate nine-hole golf course. Seen here is a mali moving the green*

*FOLLOWING PAGE CLOCKWISE (p138). After a rainy day, fresh flowerpots are arranged on the grand staircase leading to the main building before a ceremonial event*

*The workhorse of the Rashtrapati Bhavan gardens—the hand-drawn cart*

*The head gardener Bir Singh (centre) alongside Mansoor Begh and Suraj Dev of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in their official uniform in the Mughal Garden*

*A sweeper clears out the fallen leaves from the Spiritual Garden established under the presidency of A.P.J. Abdul Kalam*

*FOLLOWING PAGE (p139). The President's Estate is full of distinctive sights such as this overgrown bougainvillea shrub*



















## HORSES AND CARS AT THE RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN

The viceregal estate had included stables and garages located in the northern part. These stables were different from the ones at the opposite end in the south belonging to the bodyguard since all the viceregal families to have lived in the Viceroy's House were keen riders and kept their own horses. The stable and garage buildings faced each other, besides resembling each other as consisting of white-washed low structures with a front portico interspersed with squat square domes with red trimming. It was a characteristic feature in Lutyens' style to integrate modern conveniences such as a garage but design it to look like a more traditional building such as stables.

Recognising the heritage value of these buildings, the structures have been retained and, indeed, adapted to house a public museum complex inaugurated in 2015-16. The stables and the garages have in turn been relocated in the southern part of the estate in keeping with their changing function and requirements. The former viceregal stables have since Independence mainly contained the coach horses that draw the presidential carriages. These have been linked to the PBG so these horses can be cared for alongside those used by the bodyguard. The older garages have also been split up between the carriages and the cars the former also shifted to the bodyguard lines to be garaged in the mechanical transport (MT) area and the latter to a modern garage.

The coaches unit consists of 10 draught horses and the five carriages that are still in use—two carriages are on display in the museum—and the team of syce-sickligars, postillions and coachmen that look after these horses and coaches.<sup>51</sup> On ceremonial occasions such as the Republic Day and Beating Retreat parades as well as the inaugural session of the parliament, various presidents have travelled in the 'gold' coach, as it used to be called since it is embossed with the Indian national emblem—which replaced the British crown of the colonial period—in gold. However, the presidential use of open carriages was abandoned in the early 1980s until the practice was recently revived by President Mukherjee, who thrilled spectators by arriving for consecutive Beating Retreats in a carriage drawn by six horses manned

PREVIOUS PAGE. Citrus trees in the Dalikhana (Photo by Narendra Bisht)

On a dark, overcast day during the monsoon season, the presidential carriage emerges from the tunnel connecting the two courts onto the South Court. Three postillions steer the three pairs of horses while a pair of coachmen ride at the back and handle the breaks on the vehicle













by three postilions and attended by a coachman. The coaches personnel are devoted to their hefty horses as described by the veteran head coachman, Tota Ram: 'A day for us coachmen starts early around 4.30 when we feed the horses. After this, they'll have to wait till 6.30 in the evening till they are given their second feed. After being fed in the morning, the horses are taken for a ride in the PBG parade ground along with the horsemen of the PBG. Their daily training ends at 10 in the morning, after which the men bathe and oil their horses.'<sup>52</sup> Tota Ram, who has been in the service of the president since the late 1960s remembers his time as filled with ups and downs: 'Working with horses is my favourite part of the job. I have seen many foals aging gracefully here in the President's Estate. Though sometimes, they can surprise us. One day, five years ago, I fell off my horse during our early morning rides and badly injured myself . . . I can't ride for too long now, but I am glad that I can spend the next couple of years till my retirement in this beautiful estate.'

The new garage unit was inaugurated in February 2015. Situated behind the ceremonial guard lines, this sprawling garage houses two bulletproof limousines, reserved for major state events as well as the two sedans, which are more nifty in congested, narrow roads. It also includes two ambulances for emergencies. The viceroys used to use Rolls Royces but, in recent times, the presidents have opted to use the Mercedes Benz F600—even the ambulances are Mercedes Benzs! When the president sits in the cars, the number-plate is covered with a plate bearing the national emblem against a red background. The garage unit is large, consisting of 70 employees headed by the garage superintendent and including drivers, mechanics, clerks as well as a couple of security guards. Though the drivers are usually dressed in safari suits, on state occasions, they wear their ceremonial uniform in white (for summer) and red (for winter) with an elaborate golden long collar adorned with the national emblem. Asad Parvez, the senior secretarial assistant, says: 'Not only do we look after the presidential cars, but also many of the cars of the presidential cavalcade . . . We need to ensure that the garage establishment is always ready for any emergency.'<sup>53</sup> The oldest presidential limousine bought in 1985 is now showcased in the new museum complex.

*The presidential limousine is driven by the chauffeur M. Pandey, who cuts a grand figure in his official uniform featuring a richly woven gold brocade long collar*

*The military secretary, Major General Anil Khosla, alongside Colonel Dhiraj Chengappa, Lieutenant Colonel Amit Bhardwaj and Risaldar Major Ramesh Singh from the President's Bodyguard at the regiment*

*The bay horse, Victory, is almost seen in flight as he canters in the riding area of PBG lines*



## LASTING MEMORIES

‘Rashtrapati Bhavan, like any postcolonial monument, bears a mixed legacy. Faltering and discontinuous, the transformations of the building through objects, behaviours, and interpretive histories have solidified it as a proud monument to India appropriate to house the Head of State’.<sup>54</sup> The memories of those that have served and lived in the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the estate are also an aspect in this transformation. They have served to personalise a space and an institution (of the presidency) which could easily be construed as imposing and imperious. These memories may be streaked with a sense of history and privilege (of having lived on Raisina Hill) but, at their core, they are personal, intimate—and even quirky.

In recent times, the auditorium and the museums are increasingly becoming community hubs that relieve the work routine of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Earlier traditions of film screenings, cultural performances and sporting events are continued to provide opportunities for entertainment and interaction. Old-timers such as Minhaz Ali, once chief cook, remember visits by directors and celebrities to screen their films as a regular feature in the 80s and 90s. Minhaz particularly remembers Randhir Kapoor screening his production *Heena* and the screening of the hugely popular 3D movie *Chota Chetan*.<sup>55</sup> In the days before 24x7 television, internet or mobile phones, such film screenings were highly popular with the residents. He remembers how in President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy’s time, the cinema hall in the basement screened a Telugu film (since the president was from Andhra Pradesh) on Thursdays and an English film on Fridays. On Sundays, there would be two Hindi film screenings for families from the estate.<sup>56</sup>

Of late, the Rashtrapati Bhavan has organised special screenings of the films *Talwar* and *Piku*. The screening of the latter included a special treat as the star of the film, Amitabh Bachchan, attended and introduced the film. It made the evening that much more memorable for the film-goers including residents of the estate and visitors. A teacher-in-residence at the Rashtrapati Bhavan described the experience. ‘Amitabh Bachchan introduced the film as one about the relationship between a father and daughter, with the daughter caring for her “father who suffers from I will not say what now”. While the rest of us laughed right through the film, he maintained a serious face! But then it’s not every day that you hear Bachchan say that he is “happy to see the inspired teachers from India’s Central Universities in our midst”’.<sup>57</sup> Cultural performances are also routinely organised at the Rashtrapati Bhavan under the Indra Dhanush banner giving the privileged inhabitants of the estate the opportunity to watch musicians, dancers and theatre personalities perform to a small gathering. Sporting events such as polo, cricket and football matches are organised for the residents.

On being asked about his favourite spot in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Suresh Yadav responded: ‘The north staircase! And so few people use this. This entrance is magnificent and powerful in a way different from the forecourt. Walking up and down its stairs is an experience’.<sup>58</sup> Captain Prashant Singh emphasised, ‘If you come to a place like this in the heart of Delhi, every point here will enchant you. Be it the *chikoo* orchards or the gym or the golf course. And then my office is my space too.’<sup>59</sup> It is no wonder that a recently outgoing ADC to President Mukherjee (and President Patil before that), Major Shobhit Pandey, rued that everything would seem ‘second-best’ after the Rashtrapati Bhavan.<sup>60</sup>

In a manner of speaking, it is the long-term residents, who have spent their entire working life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as permanent staff, who are the true custodians of Raisina Hill. Ram Charan Singh, after retiring in 2014 as a horticultural superintendent, keeps returning to his old stomping ground, the Dalikhana, to catch up with his friends, give newcomers tips and refresh old memories.<sup>61</sup> However, no matter what the length of service at the Rashtrapati Bhavan is, it is impossible to have lived this extraordinary life and not have been changed by it. It is this feeling that is perhaps the greatest unifier at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

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NEXT PAGE: *Monsoon at the Rashtrapati Bhavan* (Photo by Narendra Bisht)













## CHAPTER 6

# THE PRESIDENT'S ESTATE



Surajit Sarkar

**L**ife at the Rashtrapati Bhavan is not limited to the main building, consisting of a vast pillared façade and a monumental dome behind intricate wrought-iron gates, but spread throughout the President's Estate that surrounds it. If the main building is at the centre of the Indian capital, the secluded estate is a world unto itself.

A visitor to the Rashtrapati Bhavan may not easily gauge the multiple processes at work at the President's Estate. In one sense, the township may be considered a microcosm of the Indian state—both as the apex of the state apparatus in the presidency and as a micro site making visible the transformations underway in India. An exploration of the day-to-day life and work at the Rashtrapati Bhavan—the main building and the estate surrounding it—reveals a many-layered narrative with interlocking stories. In this sense, an investigation of life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan is a compilation of the stories of all those who work and live here at different levels, not necessarily fitting a common representation of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, but as much a part of it as the presidency. The formal aspects of the site intermingle with the personal and the domestic, but these stories circle around a central unifying force of the presidency.

If the previous chapter examined the exceptional opportunities that come with working in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, this chapter looks particularly at the aspects of life surrounding the entire township of about 330 acres that demarcate the property. The Rashtrapati Bhavan functions like a complete township; the 7000 odd residents (1850 staff) of the estate protected in its gated enclosure by a 1000 security personnel, have access to top facilities to different degrees. This chapter examines the polyphony of distinct but generally overlooked voices of diverse sections of people who inhabit the President's Estate through an exploration of their interactions with specific sites, events and individuals. The perceptions of the place among the long- and short-term residents across the different levels are marked by the sense of exceptional circumstances and are carried by the residents even when they are away from the estate on visits—including visits to their family and, in a sense, actual homes—and after they cease to live on the estate. The documentation of these voices necessitated a team of oral historians (led by the author of this chapter) to interact with the residents through pleasant and intimate conversations with them, to tap stories intermingling myth, history and contemporary experiences, to represent their experiences in the best manner possible. The aim of this oral history exercise was twofold, to highlight the importance of memory in the previous chapter in the context of the main building of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and to include in the historical record of the Rashtrapati Bhavan the experiences and perspectives of those residents of the President's Estate who might otherwise have been 'hidden from history'.

*A view at dusk of the old dargah located within the estate. This is the sole remnant of the old Mewati village on Raisina Hill*







There is an apocryphal story about a long-term attendant who was the regular stand-in for the president at rehearsals. He would be teased mercilessly about having a fault in his (astrological) stars since he was doomed to spend his life posing for the president. Not to be outdone, he would respond that, on the contrary, his was a particularly good kismet since presidents would come and go, but his role (as the president) would remain constant.

## HERITAGE ESTATE

By the beginning of the 21st century, the estate faced a series of challenges. Old residential buildings were falling into disrepair and unauthorised haphazard constructions had cropped up in the estate. The challenge lay in preserving the architectural heritage of the estate while upgrading the residences and facilities for modern living. As discussed in the third chapter, President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam commissioned building projects to provide residents with better residential quarters. President Mukherjee has been concerned with the conservation of heritage buildings and adapting abandoned buildings to new uses. As the secretary to the president, Omita Paul says: ‘As the township grows, there are requirements that emerge. If we don’t provide spaces for these changing requirements, people will set them up any way.’<sup>1</sup> One of the first initiatives of the current presidency was to commission the INTACH-CPWD designed conservation master plan so changes to the estate were made within the framework of conservation.

Comprehensive measures have since been initiated for the restoration and preservation of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the estate. This has also inspired the revival of its gardens, nature trails, nurseries, conservatories and other green areas of the estate. Responding to the increasing numbers of visitors to the Rashtrapati Bhavan after being made more accessible, President Mukherjee at the inauguration of the Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum in 2015 hoped it would enable the people of the nation to obtain an inside view of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, its art, architecture and vibrant community as well as educate them on the lives of various presidents.<sup>2</sup>

It took nearly eight years, from 1921 to 1929, to build the 340 room sandstone mansion of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.<sup>3</sup> It is thus not surprising that the maintenance of such a huge mansion and the vast estate is a gigantic undertaking. Lutyens’ last visit to India in 1938 was, interestingly, not to design something new but to restore the old, as discussed in the second chapter. To begin with, the house was meticulously designed, be it the Mughal-inspired *jalis* or the lion-shaped door knobs or the lantern style streetlights; all have a story to tell. As the travel writer Robert Byron wrote

complimenting the master architect, ‘few artists can have written so complete an epitaph of themselves on one spot’.<sup>4</sup> No wonder that Lutyens alone was considered worthy of executing the first restoration of the house. Since Independence, different presidents have commissioned the restoration of different aspects of the house and the estate.

The two British Raj clock towers in the President’s Estate stopped ticking one day.<sup>5</sup> One of the two British companies that were involved in their making had, in fact, shut shop by this time and the other quoted an exorbitant fee. Experts from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), New Delhi, were called on to fix the problem. Just as well since these two clock towers were identified as special heritage buildings within the estate by INTACH in the course of preparing the conservation master plan for the estate commissioned by the current presidency. The chief architect of this plan, A.G.K. Menon, pointed out that the unique furniture of the place was getting lost, as some had disappeared and some was being junked instead of being repaired.<sup>6</sup> In the late 1980s, the glittering original chandelier that was hung in the centre of the Durbar Hall in the main building, especially made by Osler, UK, for the Viceroy’s House, came crashing down! Fortunately, no one was hurt. An Indian manufacturer, Kundan Patel, was engaged to replicate the original chandelier. Her daughter-in-law Sangita Patel candidly confesses that they, at least, were glad: ‘If it would not have fallen, we would not have got this opportunity.’<sup>7</sup>

Some of Lutyens’ signature pieces, in addition to original architectural drawings and sketches, have since been put on display in the newly inaugurated Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum, with a view to preserving the bespoke aesthetics of the Rashtrapati Bhavan for future generations to see and experience. The museum is not the only edifice that has fallen into disuse but put to new uses. One of the clock towers, near the museum, has been reinvented as a visitor management centre. A circular heritage building that was in a ramshackle condition has been remodelled as the home of traditional therapies at the estate, AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) Wellness Centre. One of the roundabouts has recently been transformed into the Pranab Mukherjee Public Library.

*CLOCKWISE. The old stables and garage buildings have been renovated to serve as the site of the new museum inaugurated by President Pranab Mukherjee on 25 July 2016*

*Guests and residents of the President’s Estate avail of the cycles provided by the President’s Secretariat*

*Visitors throng the Mughal Garden at the onset of every spring, seen here is a young couple taking photos next to the bright flowers*

*The President’s Bodyguard is known for its immaculateness as they rally to keep the PBG lines clean*







With 69 heritage buildings on the estate, the ongoing restoration based on the master plan involves the preservation of original plaster and Kotah stone flooring, repair of conical obelisks and the cleaning and painting of fireplaces in keeping with the original integrated design. As the Rashtrapati Bhavan continues to be reinvented in spirit to keep up with changing contemporary realities, it is also important that its historical architectural legacy is preserved for posterity.

## FACILITIES FOR EDUCATION

It was President Shankar Dayal Sharma who renamed the higher secondary school as Dr Rajendra Prasad Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, from the more prosaic Uchatar Madhyamik School, to honour the first president and his initial efforts to improve the school.<sup>8</sup> The school started functioning in its present form from 5 May 1962. President Kalam was known for his impromptu sessions with students and visits to classrooms. On Teacher's Day, 4 November 2015, President Mukherjee, once a political science lecturer, took a special class, speaking to the students of classes XI and XII about the constitution, and reflected on the sea change in the educational format since his time as a student. 'When I was in school, our history books were written by the colonial British. In our exam, 40 per cent of the marks weightage was on British history. But today, you study about Indian Independence movement'.<sup>9</sup> President Kalam added to school infrastructure significantly by arranging for more laboratories, providing computer terminals in the school and providing bicycles free of cost to children of lower-income families. President Mukherjee has continued the tradition by developing the school into a model school for other government schools to emulate. Besides becoming one of the first solar-powered schools in Delhi, the school playground has been renovated, free Wi-Fi is available all over and a floor with knowledge resources, such as books and computers has been set up, together with a sensitisation programme for children with special needs.

With 87 teachers, the students here are better placed for one-to-one teaching-learning experiences than at many other government schools. However, the fact that the school is located within the President's Estate is not without its own share of stories. In September 1975, the principal wrote to the military secretary that the children coming to school in the morning were always late as they could not cross the area where the president along with senior officials played golf.<sup>10</sup> This was remedied, and the estate school remained a project close to the different presidents.

Complementing this school, the President's Estate also has a playschool, called Sanskar, and a school named Sparsh to cater to the needs of differently abled children. This focus on education and knowledge has enhanced the quality of life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan for its residents and their children.

*CLOCKWISE. Students of the Dr Rajendra Prasad Sarvodaya Vidyalaya pose outside the school premises after a long school day*

*Children within the estate taking advantage of the yoga and dance classes being organised within the precincts of the Pranab Mukherjee Public Library*











## THE MARKET AS A PUBLIC SPACE

As stalls were being set up for the Gandhi Jayanti celebrations on 2 October 2015 in the marketplace, a market-goer remarked that the president visits these stalls, causing great excitement among the residents. Looking at the hustle and bustle of the stalls being set up, a bystander said, 'Once you get into this place, you hardly ever have to go out.'<sup>11</sup> Another struck a discordant note as he grumbled: '*Ration hai, bachchon ka poorā items milta hain, lekin jo main cheezein hai vo nahin hai. Pehle sab tha, jootē-chappal ki dukaan, mochi, naayi, photographwala sab the*' (Household necessities are available along with things for children. However, lots of basic things like a footwear shop, cobbler and photographer no longer exist).<sup>12</sup> Such are the diverse feelings evoked by the market as the socio-cultural hub for the residents here.

Encountering such comments and insights made the oral history field team wonder at how the residents of the estate would make sense of what they see and hear in terms of the unique life in the wider world of the presidential establishment. The diversity of backgrounds and professions in the self-contained township insulated from the megacity around it, makes it difficult for the uninitiated to locate individual experiences within the larger note of life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Many of the staff of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and their families, when asked questions about everyday life, brought the conversation to the small everyday concerns such as finding basic items for daily use (affordable vegetables, needle and thread, cobbler, petrol). The shops within the market also seem to provide the young with gainful employment within the estate. Concerns such as the safety of girls or maintaining household autonomy from the schedules of the working members are taken care of. A space for commerce and livelihood, the market in the estate has been referred to by a shop-owner as a safe place, open and stress free, where there is no need to lock up, for everyone here is part of the same Rashtrapati Bhavan family. Such familiarity indicates bonds that extend the buyer-seller or employee relationships into a more intimate zone. A conversation with a group of residents introduced the term 'estate heritage' to the market with a sense of pride, while others were critical but never dismissive. No wonder that the oral history team, seeking a feel of life in the estate, was constantly referred to the market.

Despite its location at one end of the estate and distant from the imposing main building, the market enters every conversation that attempts to evoke the changes over the years. Usually not at the centre of any conceptual framework to understand life in a township, the market is, however, an important node for the casual information networks, public as well as specific and unique. The market in the President's Estate today consists of a

complex of 10 permanent, concrete-built shops along one stretch of road in the residential area. On most days, the only sign of outdoor activity here are two stalls in the open, arranged on a *chaupal* like platform beneath a spreading tree. The hectic activity around them include selling chips, toffees and savouries much favoured by the children, who play around there in the evenings.

People in the estate speak very fondly of this interactional space and its intimate personal nature. Despite its façade, the marketplace is remembered as a typical Indian bazaar, full of references to lively exchanges and with favourite shops being remembered as '*ghar-jaisa*' (an extension of home). As a secure and accessible environment, families who were contacted did not feel marooned or dependent on any member of the household to buy household supplies.<sup>13</sup> Residents mostly consider venturing out of the estate to procure necessary items a fraught exercise, which requires negotiating central Delhi's traffic surrounding the island of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. 'Not wanting the children to cross the road every day was the reason the estate authorities decided to hold computer classes within', explains another resident.<sup>14</sup>

The departmental store in the redeveloped market is sometimes the source of purchases for the presidential household. This store stocks items from coffee, chips and chocolates to regular *parchni samaan* (essential domestic supplies).<sup>15</sup> The owner, Satish Kumar, belongs to a President's Estate family and did not mind abandoning a career 'off campus' in 1988 when made the offer to manage the shop, a job that he continues to do till today. Even though he feels secure as the proprietor of the departmental store of the estate, he is keen to ensure that the stock is kept up-to-date for not just residents who frequent it but also in case he has to provide supplies to the household of different presidents.<sup>16</sup>

'*Narayanan saab, unke baal ghane the*' (President Narayanan had a thick mop of hair), is how Sunil Kumar, the barber at the market, remembers his presidential client.<sup>17</sup> Earlier he used to style the hair of many dignitaries, including senior government officials from outside the Rashtrapati Bhavan. However, as security arrangements became stringent over time, his clientele became restricted to the staff and residents of the estate. 'Earlier, the place

FACING PAGE CLOCKWISE. President Pranab Mukherjee examines the vegetables on sale in the grocery shop in the market

The itinerant barber on the estate, Sunil Kumar, sets shop under a tree opposite to the market

The newly inaugurated market in the President's Estate







was very different; people used to be surprised that this was the Rashtrapati Bhavan. It was like a jungle, with lots of grass, tall grass! There was nothing here when I got married. Then they cleaned things up, set up a parking area and grew flowers', says one resident.<sup>18</sup> Others remember that shops were allotted by 1971 after a *pucca* market was constructed. Till two years back, people from the outside could come and shop here. With increasing security, this is no longer possible.

Forty-five years later, on 18 May 2014, the shop-owners vacated their allotments to make way for a major redevelopment, though some were subsequently given permission to set up small stalls. Departmental stores and a supermarket with new retail practices, pricing and products are not as conducive to conversation, bargaining and the fluid information exchanges of an earlier time. Besides, the renovated market has a different range of goods and services compared to what was found earlier and residents have had to expand their shopping beyond the estate.

## FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS

Festivities and celebrations are held at the estate on various days, from national holidays like Gandhi Jayanti to locally important festivals like Baisakhi, Lohri and Janmashtami or the Iftar party hosted by the president. On these occasions, stalls and buntings come up and the arrival of the president adds to the fun and frolic of the entire place. The president, along with the officers, heartily takes part in these festivities by meeting and greeting and even eating with the crowds of estate residents. The celebrations like that of Navratri and Diwali are accompanied by *jagrans* and *kirtans* organised by the residents. The performance of the *Ramlila* is quite popular and a lot of preparation goes into making it a hit spectacle. These are again different avenues for the residents of the township to build up a stronger community feeling and create a feeling of belongingness to the place. For Navaratri there is no one big puja on the estate. People meet others in their own block and eat together. 'We go to the secretary [to the president, Omita Paul] who makes a note of the things people need, and passes it on to the concerned offices.'

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE RESIDENTS

Life in the President's Estate can present unexpected opportunities for work and even entrepreneurship. For instance, a beauty parlour in the market began three years ago, was the initiative of Updesh Kaur, the wife of one of the President's Bodyguard (PBG). Moving into the estate a year after her marriage, Updesh's application to manage the initiative was supported by her husband and others at the PBG and the estate administration. But getting the contract was not easy. There was a thorough examination including a practical test and interviews.<sup>19</sup> 'Today the market has become our work station,' she says. She refers to her staff of four girls, all estate residents, as members of the Rashtrapati Bhavan family. Their employment here is not only an outcome of the proximity and trust that the estate residents have for each other but has also got a pragmatic dimension. Updesh revealed that the long and tiresome process of applying for an entry pass, which requires regular renewal, is a disincentive for people living outside to come to work in the estate. Staying and working within the estate allows Updesh to balance her working hours with her commitments at the school for special children in the estate, called Sparsh. The school takes care of the children while their parents are out for work and also adds to their development and growth. Initiatives such as Sparsh also help foster a more supportive environment. Updesh's grooming skills are used by a range of people on the estate. The last president, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, avails of her service to date when she is in Delhi on a visit.

Sajru Nisha, one of the workers at the beauty parlour, happily notes that her father worked in the Rashtrapati Bhavan as a butler. No wonder he is forever trying to correct the cutlery placement at home, inevitably giving up, saying, '*sab bachhe hain*' (they are all children)!<sup>20</sup> Such warm informality is a hallmark of everyday life in the estate and such micro lives are the other side to the protocol in the macro life of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

*FACING PAGE: 'Nukkar Ramlila', the younger generation on the estate makes an annual ritual of collecting the funds for and erecting an effigy of Ravan on the eve of Dussehra, which is set on fire amid much excitement*



## PERCEPTIONS OF PLACE AT THE ESTATE

'I serve the government, it's all the same to me, was the reply to a question about which viceroy or president a retainer most enjoyed working for.'<sup>21</sup> The regular visits to the estate brought several people from diverse backgrounds into conversation. For instance, a young sowar with the PBG, Jagdeep Singh, once took great pleasure in describing the strict criteria for selection to the PBG, including a test of physical ability and an interview to assess personality.<sup>22</sup> He recounted how someone once tried too hard to make an impression at the physical tests and ended up hurting his shoulder. He described how working at the Rashtrapati Bhavan was a privilege and recounted how when some go home, they like to show their Rashtrapati Bhavan identity cards to impress others. Speaking for himself, he was proud that he gets to participate in the parades when foreign dignitaries come on state visits and looks forward to being part of the president's mounted escort on the national stage on Republic Day.

Another factor in perceptions of place at the Rashtrapati Bhavan is concerned with the length of service and stay. The oral history team found it easier to engage in spontaneous conversations with old-timers as opposed to recent incomers to the estate, who would initially be reticent or insist on a written questionnaire and thought-out responses. It thus came as no surprise that some of the most interesting stories about the estate came from the staff and residents who have been working and living here for years.

Even though generations of Rashtrapati Bhavan retainers are becoming a thing of the past, such families still exist. Take, for example, Kalpana, who the oral history team encountered by the temple in the north side of the estate one day. Her father-in-law works here as a gardener, her husband is a cook, whose brother and his children have also lived and worked here. '*Mere bade jeth, vo bhi maliyon mein the. Chhe saal pehle expire ho gaye, unka beta lag gaya, maliyon mein.*' (My elder brother-in-law was also a gardener, but he died six years ago. His son became a gardener in his place).<sup>23</sup> In the Rashtrapati Bhavan canteen, her husband's working hours vary according to the shift allotted. Every month he is given a timetable and knows what time he needs to be in the canteen. Although there can be an emergency and he may have to put in an unscheduled shift, this is rare.

Kalpana takes care of her daughter who studies at the Dr Rajendra Prasad Sarvodaya Vidyalaya on campus. She describes herself as a homemaker, saying, 'someone has to look after the home. It's like this all day. The ladies sit here, children play there, and that is

how we pass the time.'<sup>24</sup> At this point an older woman joined us and Kalpana invited us all to her house for chai. We walked past a stone plaque commemorating the inauguration of the renovated quarters and were informed that much of this happened in President Kalam's time. This used to be a very old quarter, since the time of the British, for their servants. During the last renovations, bathrooms and lavatories were added to the homes. Before that, the residents used a separate communal lavatory.

The exterior of the houses has to be of the same colour and pattern, a rule that the residents have to follow. This has also helped in the aesthetic maintenance of the place. The private worlds indoors can be strikingly distinctive. For instance, inside Kalpana's flat, the living room had a purple wall and a bed, a small shrine with *diyas* or earthen lamps lit up for Diwali, a television as well as photographs of her and her husband with various people. While her daughter studies at the school in the estate itself, she need not worry about tuition lessons either. Most school-going children in the estate go to onsite tutors for help with their homework. These tutors juggle part-time lessons with their regular jobs at the Rashtrapati Bhavan or on the estate and, therefore, have houses on the estate. This makes it possible to let the children go to them without hesitation. Her husband has been working in the canteen for 13 years, one of three men with the same name, 'Vinod' (Kumar), there. As the most senior, he is known as Bada (elder) Vinod, while others are called Medium Vinod and Chhota (younger) Vinod. Trust and interdependence mark their lives in the estate. Be it a shopkeeper who might give essentials on credit or a *presswala* who would wait another day for his payment or the terminology of 'Bada' and 'Chhota' Vinod, all show bonds of a community.

Since her early days here, Kalpana learned that living in the estate was different in many ways from living elsewhere in the city. She specifically remembers not being able to wander all over the lush grounds, to the absence of a *samosawala* to get hot samosas from when a guest arrived. These days, she and her friends from the estate visit the market at Pahardganj or Gol Market or she goes out with her husband in the car. This led to a conversation about relationships between residents on the estate and Kalpana felt that places like the women's centre, where women's groups make objects for sale, become sites of social networking. Despite the limited opportunities available to homemakers like her, domestic life on the estate allows sufficient time for the residents to interact and share their lives with each other. As a result, the concerns, the joys, the arguments are all that one may see in any regular Delhi colony. The estate is thus a part of the larger cosmos existing outside.





*Evening walks near the Dalikhana area, President's Estate*

*A view of the new housing complexes replacing basic colonial accommodation, which were built for the residents during the tenure of President A.P.J. Kalam; interiors and exteriors of Kalpana- and Vinod's house*



## GREEN AND SMART INNOVATIONS

In the context of his experience of living in the Rashtrapati Bhavan and its need to constantly re-invent itself according to changing times, President Mukherjee observed: 'Life in the Rashtrapati Bhavan estate is not a realm of boredom as I was told before I arrived. There is a lot to be done here with the large community living inside the Estate, about 7,000 people and their families. Therefore, whatever programme is taken up by the government, I immediately implemented it in the Rashtrapati Bhavan.'<sup>25</sup> The focus has been on programmes that connect the people from the estate to the presidency. These initiatives cover a wide range of activities including the 'Sports Plus' activities that enable all the children in the estate to have access to the best of facilities and training. 'People started having confidence in us, as our entry into their spaces were gradual and without fanfare. We began engaging the young first through sports and as this grew, we also moved into areas of academic engagement. Without changing the teachers, we enhanced the technological support that was available to them,' explains Omita Paul.<sup>26</sup> For elders, the presidency instituted 'Samagam', a community initiative for senior citizens of the estate, which offers them the chance to get together on a daily basis, have free health check-ups and participate in recreational activities. 'We even got a harmonium for the seniors to use in their singing sessions.'<sup>27</sup>

While inaugurating an AYUSH Wellness Centre inside the estate after the renovation of an old unused building, President Mukherjee drew attention to some of the programmes underway at the estate. As discussed in the previous chapter, residents mention the various green initiatives on the estate, including a solar power unit and regular composting of organic refuse.<sup>28</sup> One recent 'green initiative' includes a sewage treatment plant enabling the Rashtrapati Bhavan to meet most of its water requirements for gardening by recycling waste water. With 190 acres of greenery, including the famous Mughal Garden, there is an acute shortage of water for horticulture, especially during the summer. The non-availability of adequate water was adversely affecting the birds, many of which are migratory species and whose presence depends on the eco-system around the forest area and green cover in the estate. The total water supply to the President's Estate from all sources is in the range of 16–18 lakh litres per day, most of which becomes sewage. The existing Dalikhana lake is now made to serve as the collection point of treated water and its size has increased three times from its earlier

*An old majestic tree near the recently inaugurated sewage treatment plant*











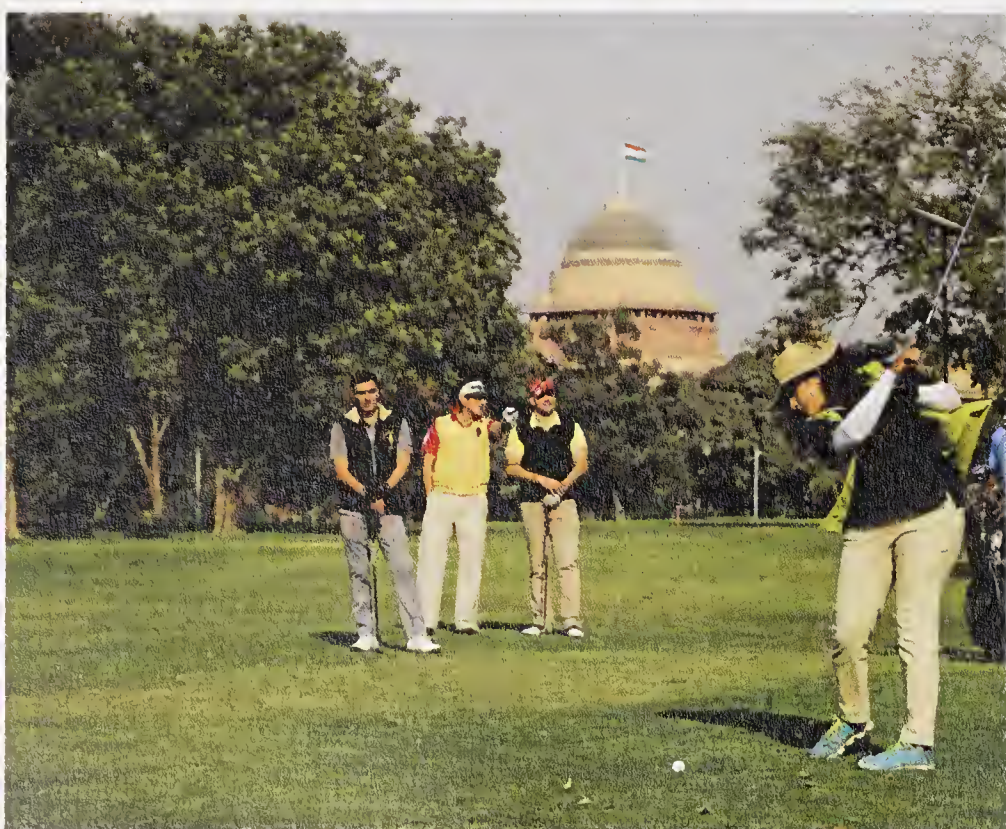
one to a water body of 5 million litres. The summer of 2016 has seen it become a rich habitat for water birds in the northern Ridge area of Delhi, which lacks such water bodies. In addition, 18,000 young fishes have been added to the Dalikhana lake.<sup>29</sup>

Residents across different sectors have appreciated the initiative under which computer classes were introduced a few years ago. Not just the young, but all age groups at the estate have availed of these classes, and it has helped to lay the foundation for a 'smart' estate in more ways than one. In May 2015, the President's Estate was made into a Wi-Fi zone. A year later, in May 2016, the estate became a smart township, accessible to all by the 'monitor' app for mobile phones. By making sense of data streaming in from various sources on the estate, it enables residents to report issues such as broken streetlights, electricity failure and water wastage and then check the resolution status by using their mobile devices. This mobile application also allows residents to report these issues, using their mobile devices on a real-time basis. This in turn is used to provide enough details such as location coordinates and address to concerned departments, helping residents become more socially responsible, aware and collaborative.



The casual networks around the market, the rigid structures of the estate buildings, and the people who connect and make meaning of the tangible structures of the estate are all integral to the life of the Rashtrapati Bhavan community. It has been interesting to see how the repeated interweaving of the formal and the informal developed a perception of the community by the people who live and work here.

'I am not a pessimist. For me, the glass is always half full, rather than half empty. I could go to the extent of saying that the glass of modern India is more than half full. Our productive working class, our inspiring farmers, who have lifted a famine-wrecked land to food surplus status, our imaginative industrialists and entrepreneurs, in the private and the public sectors, our intellectuals, our academics and our political class have knit together a modern nation that has leapt, within mere decades, across many centuries in economic growth and progressive social legislation.'<sup>30</sup>



Though the above remark by President Mukherjee was aimed at explaining his vision for nation building, one can very much see this spirit within the President's Estate, which has emerged as a space welcoming change and expanding with time. It is evident that even while the estate operates like a structured township, it contains a community that is open to the changes they witness in the estate.



## NOTES

- 1 Personal communication with Omita Paul.
- 2 Speech by President Pranab Mukherjee at the dedication of the Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum, New Delhi, 25 July 2014.
- 3 <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/pirb.htm>.
- 4 Robert Byron, *New Delhi* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1931), 29.
- 5 *The Economic Times*, 24 July 2015.
- 6 *The Guardian*, 18 July 2014.
- 7 Interview in English with Sangita Patel and Jayesh Patel (Kasi Chandeliers) (New Delhi: 2 August 2016).
- 8 See the second chapter.
- 9 *Hindustan Times*, 9 September 2015.
- 10 File No.39/CER/8627/75, Ceremonial Section, Rashtrapati Bhavan Record Room.
- 11 Interactions with market-goers at Schedule B market (New Delhi: October 2015).
- 12 Interview in Hindi with Rajendra Kumar (New Delhi: 14 September 2015). Rajendra Kumar is a gardener at the President's Estate.
- 13 Interview in Hindi with Kalpana Kumar and friends (New Delhi: 21 September 2015).
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Interview in Hindi with Satish Kumar and Ramesh (New Delhi: 1 October 2015). Satish Kumar is a cooperative shop owner, Schedule B market.
- 16 Interview with Satish Kumar.
- 17 Interview in Hindi with Sunil Kumar (New Delhi: 9 October 2015).
- 18 Interview with Kalpana and friends.
- 19 Interview in Hindi with Updesh Kaur (New Delhi: 1 October 2015).
- 20 Interview in Hindi with Sajru Nisha (New Delhi: 1 October 2015).
- 21 Khushwant Singh, *City Improbable: An Anthology of Writings on Delhi* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010).
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- 24 Ibid.
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- 26 Personal communication with Omita Paul.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Interview with Rajendra Kumar.
- 29 Rashtrapati Bhavan, press release, 8 June 2015.
- 30 Address by President Pranab Mukherjee to the nation on the eve of India's 66th Independence Day, 'Nation Building: Learning from the Past to Secure our Future', 14 August 2012.

FACING PAGE. Gardeners at work in the Dalikhana area

Solar panels near the Dalikhana

Savera Chengappa, the wife of the commandant of the President's Bodyguard, tees off as the second-in-command, Lieutenant Colonel Amit Bhardwaj, and the regimental medical officer, Lieutenant Colonel Adarsh Sharma, watch on





## THE PRESIDENT'S ESTATE AS A SETTING

The iconic route to the Rashtrapati Bhavan is up Rajpath—the broad axial avenue that connects it with the other great landmark of New Delhi, India Gate—and leads up the slope of Raisina Hill. It passes the sandstone edifices of the North and South Blocks to the right and left and past the hustle and bustle associated with the offices in these buildings. The main building of the Rashtrapati Bhavan stands behind three interconnected intricate wrought-iron gates. Of the three gates, two are reserved—the first, on the right, called the gate number 3, for the prime minister and the cabinet; the second, in the centre, called the gate number 1, for the president, visiting heads of states and the first-time visit of incoming ambassadors to India. All three lead past the sentinel Jaipur Column into the forecourt laid with red gravel. The main building presents an imposing sight. It is this aspect of the building which is best known. However, the building belongs in a larger complex, standing at the tip of the crescent-shaped estate that lies behind it.





The estate is basically divided into three parts behind the building: Schedule A to the left, Schedule B to the right and the grounds and gardens in between. To the left lies the bodyguard lines consisting of the offices, stables and houses of the household cavalry of the president known as the President's Bodyguard (PBG),<sup>1</sup> bungalows for officers, and health and recreational facilities, including the walled garden containing the swimming pool. Towards the back of the estate lies a 'secret garden' in the heart of Delhi,<sup>2</sup> a lush green landscape of tree-lined avenues named after the different presidents, flowerbeds hedges and the grounds of a nine-hole golf course. In the summer, yellow amaltas trees flower exuberantly, covering the grounds with golden flowers, and, as pipes and sprinklers water the grounds, kites, red-naped black ibises and other birds can be seen splashing in the puddles on the grass. The same landscape is rendered emerald green during the rains, against the backdrop of which peacocks are seen dancing and courting peahen, and the papiha (pied cuckoo) is heard.<sup>3</sup> In the winter, malis brave the cold and the smog to arrive at work early in the morning, their bundled up figures on bicycles silhouetted against the thick morning light. In winter, the estate becomes a haven for a number of migratory birds.<sup>4</sup>

The back of the main building that juts into the back of the estate consists of the famous Mughal Garden with flowerbeds, stone paths and stone pools and fountains. Clay and hard tennis courts lie on either side of the Mughal Garden towards its bottom. Behind the garden complex lies the Dalikhana with orchards and kitchen gardens. To the right of the estate stands the recently constructed auditorium complex, the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre, and more bungalows for the officers, a school, housing complexes for the subordinate staff and the market, also the socio-cultural hub of the estate for the staff, including a temple and a mosque. The estate is abuzz with activity in the morning as those members of the families that work in the Rashtrapati Bhavan or on the estate head out and children go to the schools on the estate. It again comes alive in the evening when families step out to run errands, take strolls, play games and avail of all the extracurricular activities at the estate. The temple bells ring and the call to prayer is given in unison on the estate, a metaphor, one might say, for the tranquillity unique to this setting.

1 For more details of the bodyguard lines, see T.S. Mundi, 'The President's Horsemen', in *Right of the Line*, 27, 29.

2 For more details of the grounds and garden, flora and fauna of the President's Estate, see Baviskar, ed., *First Garden of the Republic*.

3 Ghazala Shahabuddin, 'Seasons: The Cycles of Life', *First Garden of the Republic*, 202.

4 Ibid., 219 – 220.

*The President's Estate is practically a 'secret garden' in the middle of the metropolis of Delhi, full of greenery and birdlife (Photos by Narendra Bisht, Dhruv Pal and Anjali Varma)*

NEXT PAGE. Young monkeys swinging from the branches of kosam trees on the estate (Photo by Narendra Bisht)













## CHAPTER 7

# SOME INITIATIVES OF THE THIRTEENTH PRESIDENCY



Omita Paul

‘I envisage an India where unity of purpose propels the common good; where Centre and State are driven by the single vision of good governance, where Democracy is not merely the right to vote once in five years but to speak in the citizen’s interest . . . As tyranny dwindles across the world, as Democracy gets fresh life in regions once considered inhospitable, India becomes the model of modernity.’<sup>1</sup>

On 25 July 2012, Pranab Mukherjee was sworn in as the 13th President of India by Justice S.H. Kapadia, the chief justice of India, in the Central Hall of the Parliament and assumed the responsibility of being the guardian of the Constitution of India. As the newly appointed President of India, Mukherjee would move into the palatial colonial-era residence, which is today called the Rashtrapati Bhavan. From this vast and magnificent edifice, the president discharges his function as the head of state and the supreme commander of the Indian Armed Forces. A seasoned politician, President Mukherjee possesses the rare distinction of having held, at different points of time, numerous top positions such as the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission and commerce, foreign, defence and finance minister. A keen reader and a dynamic leader, Mukherjee received the Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award, in 2008. Besides his intellectual and political prowess, his reputation as a solution-finder, consensus-builder and statesman has been recognised by both national and international leaders.

When President Mukherjee first moved into the Rashtrapati Bhavan, he, not unlike the rest of the Indian citizens, was acquainted solely with the majesty and grandeur of Rashtrapati Bhavan. In one of his speeches, he said, ‘I did not know that behind the imposing façade of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, there lay a living and vibrant township of over 7000 residents. This township is a micro-cosmic India where residents belong to different regions, pursue different faiths, and observe diverse customs, habits and traditions’.<sup>2</sup> At the very beginning of his tenure, he turned his attention towards these residents, who are his neighbours and colleagues, in a manner of speaking. He directed us to initiate changes that would ensure an enhanced quality of life contributing to the happiness and well being of the residents of

*President Pranab Mukherjee is escorted by his ADCs down the grand staircase, thereby beginning the Republic Day Parade, 2014*











the estate. Under the proactive guidance of President Mukherjee, we have attempted to transform the President's Estate and the Rashtrapati Bhavan into such a place. Besides discharging the constitutional duties of the president, including numerous state visits abroad, receiving heads of states of foreign countries and addressing the Parliament, among others, Mukherjee has taken the office of the presidency one step further and has endeavoured to transform the President's Estate into a 'model township' that may be replicated in any part of India. This chapter seeks to chart out the changing nature of the estate and highlights the flagship initiatives and programmes that have been initiated under the current presidency.

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However, before one delves into the nature of these initiatives and the impact on the President's Estate and its inhabitants, it is important for us to understand President Mukherjee's vision of democracy. He sees Indian democracy as 'much more than the right to vote every five years. The essence of democracy is to realise the aspirations of the masses. Its spirit must influence the responsibilities of the leaders and duties of the citizens on a daily basis. Democracy lives through a vibrant Parliament, an independent judiciary, a responsible media, a vigilant civil society, and a civil service committed to integrity and hard work. It survives through accountability, not profligacy.'<sup>3</sup>

On 25 July 2012 itself, President Mukherjee told us that the Rashtrapati Bhavan belonged to the people and should be democratised to give easy access to the public. He wanted the people of India to be able to come and experience this magnificent building and its rich legacy, not as a colonial relic but as an inalienable part of their history and culture. That he hosted a reception on 2 July 2016 for panchayat members from five villages from an adjoining state in the same hall where he hosts heads of states, union ministers, governors and leaders of the institutions of higher learning is a manifestation of that desire. He wanted honorifics such as 'Excellency' to be replaced by a simple 'Hon'ble'. To avoid causing inconvenience to common citizens from various traffic disruptions, he wanted more and more functions to be held within the President's Estate.

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To demystify this regal structure, the first step taken by us was to open the doors of the Rashtrapati Bhavan to the people by welcoming visitors for three days of the week. On these days, scholar guides take visitors on guided tours. The weekly change of the guard ceremony was glamourised and moved to the front gate. It soon became a popular tourist attraction. An internship programme was initiated to give an opportunity to young scholars

to know about various aspects of life in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. To date, over 20 lakh visitors have enjoyed the hospitality of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and its gardens.

In December 2013, an in-residence programme for innovators, writers and artists was launched. The first batch of five grassroots innovators came to stay in July 2014. Jogen Choudhury became the first artist in-resident in August 2014. A batch of four artists and writers later came to stay in September 2014. By welcoming creative people at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, not only did the vision of the president to engage the common man more with the affairs of the Rashtrapati Bhavan reach a new level, the objective of the programme—to help recharge the creative impulses of innovative minds in the serene environs of this place—too was fulfilled. A successful completion of the in-residence programme in its first year and the addition of infrastructure at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, like the Peacock Service Apartments and the Club House at 2 Mother Teresa Crescent, provided us the encouragement to expand this programme. Over the next two years, the Rashtrapati Bhavan hosted inspired teachers from central institutions, award-winning school teachers and students and PhD scholars from premier central institutions like Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Science/Indian Institutes of Science, Education and Research (IISc/IISERs), and National Institutes of Technology (NITs). It fulfilled another objective of President Mukherjee—that is to deepen his linkage with the academic community of the country. The husband-wife duo of eminent artists Paresh Maity and Jayasri Burman and of writer Amitav Ghosh and his biographer wife Deborah Baker were other guests who enjoyed President Mukherjee's hospitality under this programme. So far, a total of 150 in-residence scholars have come to stay at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The presidents of our republic have addressed the nation on the eve of the Republic and Independence Days. Presidents in the exercise of their constitutional duties have addressed the Parliament to detail the year's plans and programmes of the government of the day. Through these occasions, President Mukherjee shares the common concerns and aspirations with the citizens of the country. President Mukherjee expanded his level of engagement to specially address, twice a year, students and faculty of higher educational and research institutions through video conferences. In the video conference on August 2016, a total of 1340 institutions of higher learning were connected through the National Knowledge Network and participated in

*FACING PAGE. Inauguration of the 13th President of India in the Central Hall of the Parliament on 22 July 2012. Seen here from left to right are Chief Justice S.H. Kapadia, the outgoing president, Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, the incoming president, Pranab Mukherjee, Vice President Hamid Ansari and the speaker of the Lok Sabha, Meira Kumar (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*





*Riding lessons are now organised by the President's Bodyguard for the children residing in the estate. Seen here are bodyguards training the next generation of riders at the regimental riding school. This is one of the many initiatives to ensure that all the children on the estate have access to its first-class sports facilities*

*A view of the recently constructed Peacock Service Suites and Apartments that offer short stays enabling in-residence programmes for artists, writers, scholars, students and teachers*

*Yoga classes are also organised within the President's Estate. Seen here are wives of PBG personnel*



this interaction. He also interacts with the governors of states through video conferences at the beginning of the calendar year.

In the age of social media, the president maintains an active online presence to connect with the public and disseminate information. The official website of the president has received 439 million hits since its creation on 3 August 2012. Over 2 million people have visited the RB YouTube channel and close to 4 million have 'liked' our Facebook page. The Rashtrapati Bhavan's Twitter account, which was launched on 1 July 2014, has over 2 million followers now.

To make interaction with the Rashtrapati Bhavan a pleasant experience, e-management of visitors and e-invitation systems were put in place at the beginning of this presidency. Both are now a huge success. The twin initiative of e-presidential messages and e-residential functions systems launched on 22 July 2014 completed the cycle of engagement of the Rashtrapati Bhavan with citizens through the e-platform.

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In the early days of the 13th presidency, we started the exercise to restore the Rashtrapati Bhavan and its gardens to its past glory. The first task before us was to get expert advice on the way forward. In January 2013, we engaged INTACH to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation and Maintenance Plan to recommend how this living heritage should be restored and conserved. By May 2013, a multi-disciplinary team of over 40 experts led by A.G.K Menon produced a voluminous, brilliant report laying out the blueprint for the restoration and preservation of heritage structures in the President's Estate. After that began the transformation! Following the recommendations made by INTACH and armed with drawings and old photographs, we started the restoration of the staterooms, library, guest wing, domed structures and bungalows designed by Lutyens. We went hunting for original Lutyens furniture all over the estate; old trunks were opened, revealing quaint electrical fittings, metal lion heads of various sizes, tapestries and *zardozi*. Artefacts were retrieved from under layers of dust and cobwebs. Rare books were identified for restoration. Experts from the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), the National Museum, the Archaeological Survey of India and other expert bodies helped us with enthusiasm in this exercise.

Inside two 'rotaries' in the President's Estate, the tenements were dilapidated and marked for demolition. But they had heritage value. We decided to restore them. The painstaking efforts paid off as we turned one restored rotary into a public library (named after President Mukherjee) for the residents that was inaugurated on 25 July 2013 and the other into an AYUSH Wellness Centre

for providing holistic treatment and therapy through Indian medicinal systems. The building where the President's Estate Clinic is located was constructed in 1929. It was also renovated and restored to its original shape in 2015. It now has a well-equipped laboratory and sophisticated medical equipment for diagnosis.

Special attention was paid to the heritage features of the estate's landscape. The trees were pruned to reveal beautiful architectural features of the buildings. A massive effort was made to restore the original flora and fauna of the Aravalli range through replacement planting of identified species. Over 12,000 new trees were planted, including *neem*, *jamun* and mango that attract a lot of birds. A wetland was developed around a sewage treatment plant (STP), which was commissioned in June 2015, by planting different species of trees and shrubs to support the habitat for various fauna. A heritage signage system was also introduced. Slowly, in front of our eyes, the Rashtrapati Bhavan started coming alive. It was an arduous but exciting and rewarding journey.

Besides being a heritage building, the Rashtrapati Bhavan functions as the office-cum-residence of the President of India. Due to the numerous engagements of the president and the expanding needs from various functionalities, several new facilities have been created. A new ceremonial hall was built in a record time of less than one year and was inaugurated on 12 December 2014. This facility, integrated with the auditorium, forms the impressive Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre (RBCC). The ceremonial hall provides a grand alternate venue to welcome foreign heads of state and government and host ceremonial events like at-homes and investitures. A double-storey serviced apartments with 16 suites for guests, the Peacock Service Apartments, was built in seven months' time after it was commissioned in July 2014. The new presidential garage and stores was built in ten months' time and inaugurated on 6 February 2015. The STP with a daily capacity of 2 million litres was inaugurated by President Mukherjee on 8 June 2015, having been built in a record time of 15 months. It has the capacity to meet two-thirds of the water requirement for horticulture in the President's Estate.

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The president often says that we Indians lack a sense of history. To conserve history, we have set up the Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum Complex (RBMC), comprising the Stables Museum and the former coach house and the Garages Museum, with the reception at the clock tower. The brick and mortar activity for the museum complex involved fresh civil works as well as massive restoration of heritage structures. The structure that housed the erstwhile stables and coach house was due for demolition, but was restored to build the first phase of the museum that was



inaugurated on 25 July 2014. The nearby clock tower in Schedule B (along with the other clock tower in the bodyguard lines in Schedule A) was restored with the help of INTACH and IIT, Delhi, and was inaugurated exactly a year later. Another heritage building was used to accommodate the president's garage. Due to the paucity of space and the need for a modern garage with stores to efficiently maintain the fleet of cars, a separate facility was created, as discussed in the fifth chapter. The garages and the adjoining heritage buildings that included a bank and a petrol pump were together taken up for restoration and the construction of a world-class museum. The bank and the post office were shifted to a modern office space nearby. The foundation stone of the Garages Museum was laid on 7 October 2014. It was not an easy task to marry two civil construction objectives: restore a heritage structure and build alongside a modern building that runs two floors below the surface. Yet, in less than two years, all works, which also included putting in place an impressive display of exhibits with an innovative use of technology, was finished. This completed our museum complex, RBMC. The Garages Museum has become the first sunken museum in the country. It is a story-telling, digital museum which links the past with present, while leaving enough space for the future.

History is contained in the numerous rare books that are stacked in the Rashtrapati Bhavan library. We gave the library a thorough makeover, de-crowding it to reveal its intricate stone inlay flooring. We undertook digitisation to preserve old and rare books and photographs. We undertook the e-pustakalaya project for barcoding and cataloguing of books. Around 31,000 books have been e-catalogued. Of these, 12,000 have been scanned, of which 8,500 were uploaded on e-pustakalaya; 8.4 lakh old photographs have been digitised.

Books transmit information and knowledge across generations. There have been a few books written about the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the past. But a comprehensive series depicting each and every facet of this living heritage was missing. We initiated a Multi-Volume Documentation Project to publish 13 volumes, which we called the RB series. We collaborated for 11 of these with IGNCA and Sahapedia. Through meticulous research and documentation, these books, authored by renowned experts, provide an authentic account of the varied aspects they deal in. Ten books out of the 13 in the RB series have been released so far. The remaining three, including the present volume, will be released in December 2016.

The volume *Winged Wonders of Rashtrapati Bhavan* is a labour of love where a total of 111 species of birds have been photographed and documented. For each of the species recorded, the book provides the location, date and time of the sighting. *Indra Dhanush I* documents our in-house cultural series, which seeks to

showcase the richness and magnificence of Indian art and culture. These two volumes were released on 25 July 2014 along with the book *Thoughts and Reflections*, which is a collection of President Mukherjee's quotations on a range of subjects, from democracy and its institutions to education and innovation, from economic policy to the nation's security. Two RB series books were released one year later. *Abode Under the Dome* documents visits of heads of state to the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the first two decades post-Independence, from 1947 to 1966. *Right of the Line: The President's Bodyguard* details the history of this elite unit of the Indian Army, which has a glorious history of rendering service to the nation with distinction. The volume *The Presidential Retreats of India* was released on 11 December 2015. It documents the history and tradition connected with the two presidential residences called 'The Retreat', located in Mashobra, Shimla, and Rashtrapati Nilayam, in Bolarum, Secunderabad. On 25 July 2016, five books were released. The book *First Garden of the Republic: Nature in the President's Estate* is about the flora and fauna of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The volume *A Work of Beauty* is about the architecture and landscape of Rashtrapati Bhavan. While the book *Around India's First Table* deals with the kitchens, dining and entertaining at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The volume *The Arts and Interiors of Rashtrapati Bhavan: Lutyens and Beyond* speaks for itself as it describes the magnificence and grandeur of the interiors and artwork present within. The first of the two children's books from the series, *Discover the Magnificent World of Rashtrapati Bhavan* was also released. On that day, three folios of paintings, namely, *Paintings in the Ashoka Hall, Rashtrapati Bhavan, Company Paintings* and *Select Paintings of Rashtrapati Bhavan* were also released. Published by the Lalit Kala Akademi, these folios contain within them the digital reproduction of the work of art along with a brief content, documenting their historicity and artistic appeal. Three volumes of President Mukherjee's selected speeches have also been published. One more volume is due. After this volume and the three more books in the RB series are released, we will have a collection of 18 books from this presidency.

*The President of India along with the President's Secretariat tending to important matters in the Cabinet Room. Seen here, from left to right, are the press secretary, Venu Rajamony, the deputy press secretary, Shamima Siddiqui, social secretary, Gaitri Issar Kumar, and secretary to the president, Omita Paul, with President Pranab Mukherjee at the head of the table (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

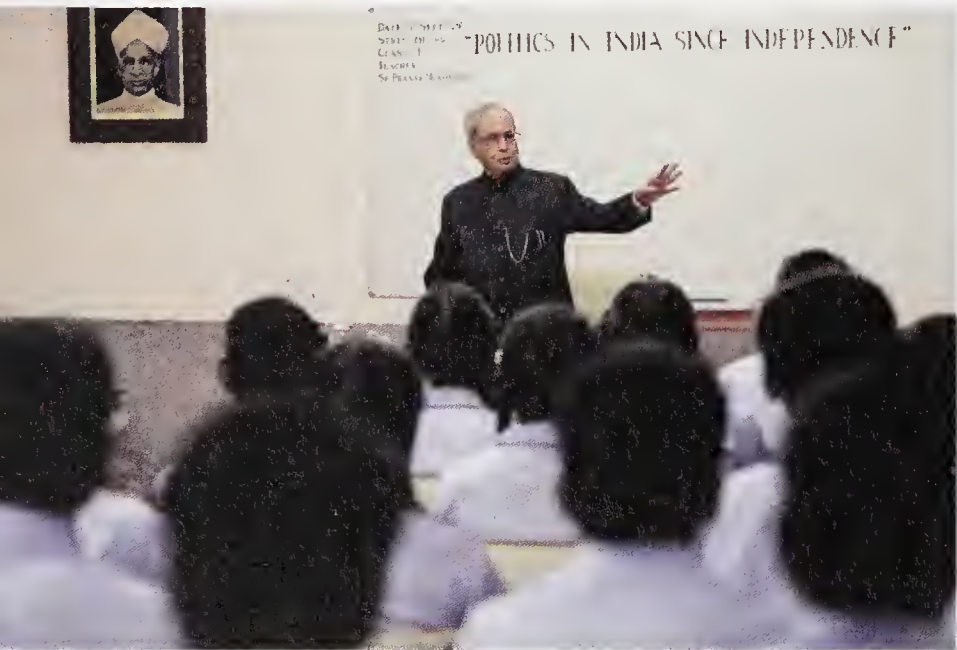
*The president goes through some of the exhibits in the recently inaugurated museum (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*Inauguration of the sewage treatment plant, June 2016 (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*











Before joining politics full time, President Mukherjee had worked as a professor of political science in a college in West Bengal. He has also authored numerous books on the economy, politics and higher education. President Mukherjee therefore has a strong affiliation for the education sector. In his address on assuming office on 25 July 2012, he had stated that ‘education is the alchemy that can bring India its next golden age’. He has visited 126 central institutes of higher learning that include central universities, IITs, NITs, IISc/IISERs, Indian Institutes of Information Technology, the National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research and others. President Mukherjee has deepened his engagement with higher educational institutions and the academic community of the country through various means. In four years of his presidency, he has visited 140 higher level institutions on special occasions like convocations and jubilee functions. He has used video conference to interact with students and faculty of higher educational and research institutions. The innovation scholars, writers, artists, inspired teachers, and students whom President Mukherjee has hosted through the in-residence programme, and about which I have mentioned earlier, are all directly or indirectly linked to education. President Mukherjee has started a practice of taking an academic delegation during his visits abroad. It has helped in providing a renewed thrust to foreign collaborations of our central institutes of higher learning. In 12 visits abroad, 92 MoUs have been signed by our central institutions.

The culture of outreach has become deeply entrenched at the Rashtrapati Bhavan under President Mukherjee. In his desire to reach out to more people and to fulfil his obligation to the 126 central institutions of higher learning, President Mukherjee has developed a deep connect with these institutions. A conference of vice chancellors of central universities was held in the Rashtrapati Bhavan in February 2013, only six months into the beginning of the 13th presidency. This was the second such conference to have been organised, the earlier one being held in 2003 during the 11th presidency. In the past four years, President Mukherjee has hosted eight conferences, including the first visitor’s conference in November 2015 after merging the stand-alone conferences of specific classes of institutions into a single platform, to create synergy amongst the central institutes of higher learning. In November 2016, the second visitor’s conference of the Rashtrapati Bhavan will be conducted.

President Mukherjee’s addresses at these conferences and in other forums like convocations outline his vision for the higher education sector. He has underlined crucial issues confronting the higher education system of our country. He has encouraged the institutions to undertake positive measures in faculty development, inspired teachers, the research atmosphere, the innovation eco-system, international rankings, industry-academia interface, institutional collaborations, technology-

enabled learning and societal connect of institutions. It has led to several positive outcomes. The government launched the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) to encourage foreign experts to teach in Indian institutions. The IMPRINT India programme was launched by President Mukherjee in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 5 November 2015 during the opening session of the visitor’s conference. IMPRINT is a pan IISc-IIT initiative to align their research priorities to ten themes of social relevance. To promote a culture of excellence in the central universities, the visitor’s award was instituted in 2014 in three categories of best university, best research and best innovation. International rankings of Indian institutions have improved. Two institutes entered the top 200 world rankings for the first time in 2015 and 90 institutions have set up industry-interface cells. 50 institutions have centres of excellence numbering 93; 84 institutions have adopted over 600 villages for converting them into model villages. The visitor’s conference has provided a fillip to industry-academia collaborations. In the 2015 conference, 43 MoUs were exchanged between the industry and academia. In the second visitor’s conference held in November 2016, as many as 68 MoUs were exchanged. This has propelled industry-academia linkages further.

President Mukherjee has laid special focus on innovation. He took initiatives to promote a culture of innovation in the country. Responding to his call, 86 central institutions have opened innovation clubs. The in-residence programme for innovation scholars, which I have already mentioned as part of the Rashtrapati Bhavan’s outreach attempt, also provides impetus to grassroots innovation. A one-week festival of innovations was organised at the Rashtrapati Bhavan for the first time in 2015. Through an innovation exhibition, global roundtables on inclusive innovations and financing of innovations and meeting of innovation clubs, this festival seeks to create linkages between the innovator, entrepreneur and financier. This festival is now a regular fixture in the annual calendar of our activities. The governors’ conference has also now become an annual feature.

*CLOCKWISE. Ambassadors present their credentials to the President of India in the Ashoka Hall*

*Tree planting initiative at the Rashtrapati Bhavan (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*

*The President of India having a meeting with Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google, in November 2013*

*President Pranab Mukherjee takes a special class with the students of the Dr Rajendra Prasad Sarvodaya Vidyalaya on Teacher’s Day, 2015. This was also broadcasted via television and the internet to schools across India (Source: Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section)*



It is President Mukherjee's strong belief that the innovative use of technology and ideas can radically transform the quality of life of citizens and bring about social good and economic wealth. To take forward this vision, a unique event was organised during the festival of innovations in March 2016: 100 software developers and programmers participated and developed smartphone apps to resolve everyday concerns such as teachers taking attendance after every class or the monitoring of entry into public monuments. The winners of the contest were felicitated by the president.

While President Mukherjee has encouraged the institutions to embrace modern technology in education, he has laid emphasis on the importance and continued relevance of the knowledge produced in the past. The context may have changed but President Mukherjee recognises the wisdom that lies in the knowledge preserved in ancient languages such as Sanskrit and Pali. These languages, he believes, will reveal to all humans 'the civilizational values that bind together the complex diversity of modern-day India and promote them among our people and the world'.<sup>4</sup> Taking this vision forward, an Indologists conference organised by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, attended by Indologists from 17 countries, for the first time in 2015 at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

President Mukherjee has also reached out to the corporate sector. On 17 December 2015, the Rashtrapati Bhavan welcomed the CEO of Google Inc., Sundar Pichai, in a roundtable discussion with senior government officials on the theme of 'technology, innovation and education'. President Mukherjee also interacted with venture capitalists and entrepreneurs from the Silicon Valley in January 2016 on the eve of the launch of the Start-up India initiative.

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The President's Estate is a township that has lived in the immediate neighbourhood of 13 presidents, two governor generals and five viceroys. It is a historic campus but also has to be a model township. President Mukherjee directed us to convert the President's Estate into a '4 Hs' township based on the principles of 'humane, heritage, hi-tech and happy'. He said all our actions and initiatives should lead to harmony, happiness and well being of all its residents. Our governance model should be based on values of compassion, care and the spirit of service. Convergence and collaboration should form the core of our implementation strategy.

Placing happiness at the centre of all our efforts, several community welfare measures were taken. It included the launch of the '4 Ss' initiative—Sanskar for pre-school children, Sparsh for specially-abled children, Samagam for senior citizens and Sanskriti

to inculcate the habit of reading and value-based learning in children in the age group of 7-14 years. The midday meal scheme was inaugurated by President Mukherjee on 15 February 2013 at the Kalyan Kendra. The school in the estate, the Dr Rajendra Prasad Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, was converted into a model green campus through technology adoption in classrooms, provision of enhanced sports facilities, solarisation, and introduction of financial and energy awareness programmes. In 2015, President Mukherjee started a practice of taking class on a relevant topic for students of classes XI and XII in this school on Teacher's Day. In 2016, a skill development programme for 'recognition of prior learning' under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana was conducted. More than 1,500 contractual and regular employees in 20 skill categories were trained and certified.

As I have mentioned earlier, the AYUSH Wellness Clinic provides the residents with treatment and therapy in alternative or traditional medicine. It is frequented in large numbers by the residents. The Pranab Mukherjee Public Library, which has a diverse collection of interesting books, newspapers and magazines, is used extensively by the residents of the estate and their children. A digital literacy programme called 'Shakti' was launched on 20 November 2013 in association with Google. It is aimed at empowering women in various fields such as education, information, the internet, communication and finance. The Sports Plus initiative was started in the formative months of this presidency. It trains talented children from the President's Estate in different games, using the sports facilities of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. A fully renovated shopping complex complete with the post office and bank to cater to the daily requirements of residents became operational in June 2013. Cricket and football league tournaments among different wings of the Rashtrapati Bhavan are organised every year. To improve physical fitness and reduce pollution levels, an RB Bicycle initiative was flagged off for the residents on 11 December 2014. Hundred bicycles have been provided for the use of employees and their family members in the President's Estate.

Cultural activities are a part and parcel of the life at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The cultural series Indra Dhanush invites renowned artists to perform here. Food festivals are organised on festivals like Baisakhi, Gandhi Jayanti and Lohri to encourage community participation. Festivals of all religions and regions, be it Jannashtami, Gurupurab, Christmas or Eid, are celebrated with equal fervour. One of the important sources of employee motivation is housing. We have taken care of the housing of the Rashtrapati Bhavan employees. Hundred outhouses belonging to class IV employees were renovated in accordance with the principles of 'green buildings'. Fifty new apartments for employees in the Kaveri and Jhelum blocks were completed under a redevelopment plan. Seventy-two apartments in a twin tower residential complex at G point behind Dr RML Hospital





*President Pranab Mukherjee greets the guests on the occasion of the at-home in the Mughal Garden as a part of the Republic Day celebrations, 2015*



are under construction and will be ready by the end of 2016.

We have also laid emphasis on the care of animals in the estate. The Rashtrapati Bhavan has 99 horses, 35 cows and five buffaloes that are managed by the President's Bodyguard. At least 111 species of birds have been spotted and surveyed in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. There are stray dogs too and a dog shelter for the stray dogs in the estate has been set up.

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We have also turned our attention to making the President's Estate a smart township. We achieved complete financial inclusion on 11 December 2014 through the opening of bank accounts, issuing of Aadhaar cards and provision of SBI Smart Change cards (for cashless shopping at the estate) for all the residents. On 22 May 2015, we became a Wi-Fi enabled digital township with 30 hotspots. A dashboard based Intelligent Operations Centre and a mobile app 'monitor' became operational for water, energy, security and waste management on 19 May 2016. On that day, President Mukherjee declared the Rashtrapati Bhavan a smart township.

We are working on adding fresh layers of smartness to the processes and systems of administration and governance. A new sprinkler and drip irrigation system has been installed that saves over 40 per cent water as compared to traditional methods. Concern for conservation of energy and the environment has led to the adoption of eco-friendly practices such as the replacement of old lighting with LED bulbs, introduction of battery-operated vehicles, installation of solar panels, segregation of waste for composting and machine-based plastics disposal.

Transformation of the Rashtrapati Bhavan into a smart township taught us many lessons. We felt confident enough to attempt its replication in a few villages in collaboration with the government of Haryana. On 2 July 2016, in the presence of the union rural development minister, chief minister of Haryana, senior officials of the Haryana government and central government like NITI Aayog, the urban development ministry, and officials and functionaries at district and panchayat levels, President Mukherjee launched a pilot project to convert five villages selected by the Haryana government (Daulha, Harchandpur, Alipur and Taj Nagar in Gurgaon district and Rojka Meo in Mewat district) into smart *grams*. For us, a smart *gram* is a humane, hi-tech and happy village, which ensures an enhanced quality of life that contributes to the harmony, happiness and well being of all the villagers. Our focus is on creating a sustainable and inclusive development model that can be easily replicated. Through the implementation of this model, which is based on the convergence of resources and efforts by the central government, state government, district

administration, panchayati raj institutions, public sector, private sector and enlightened villagers, we are working towards transforming the villages into smart *grams*. In the first phase of this project, we are focused on providing basic amenities like potable water, regular electricity, sustainable mobility, sanitation and solid waste management and clean fuel for cooking and housing; integrated healthcare at affordable prices; education and skill development; improvement in governance and service delivery; and creating livelihood opportunities by setting up village economic zones. That we are on the right path is evident from the fact that within four months of the launch of the project, we can count among our achievements, the installation of a 'water ATM' at Rojka Meo, initiation of work pertaining to strengthening of the grid for 24-hour power supply and repair and construction of road and drainage system; setting up of training centres in all villages, creation of a skill development hub at Udyog Kunj in Alipur; provision of digital connectivity in all villages; starting of an e-doctor clinic in Daulha village and wellness clinics in four villages; and the laying of the foundation of a *gramalaya* in Harchandpur, which will act as an integrated facility for various services such as a library, bank, ATM and common service centre for the village.

We recognise that change and development is a continuous process and the journey ahead is long. But we are confident that, finally, success will be ours.

## NOTES

1 'Honour, Aspiration and Responsibility', speech delivered on the assumption of office as President of India, 25 July 2012, in *Selected Speeches: Pranab Mukherjee, the President of India* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2016), 4.

2 Speech delivered at the inauguration of the Intelligent Operation Centre, President's Estate, 19 May 2016.

3 President's address to the nation on the eve of India's 67th Independence Day, 14 August 2013.

4 Inaugural address at the first international conference of Indologists, 21 November 2015.

*Omita Paul is the secretary to the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, since 25 July 2013.*

*Lutyens' architectural flourishes at the Rashtrapati Bhavan combining Indian elements with European classicism*

*NEXT PAGE. Winter sets in at the Rashtrapati Bhavan (Photo by Narendra Bisht)*















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*NEXT PAGE. Evening light burnishes the sandstone walls of the Upper Loggia*











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This book is dedicated to the residents, past and present, of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and is illuminated by their experience and memories of life in India's first home. It is impossible to thank each of them individually, but we record our warmest thanks to the residents and their families who took out the time to talk to us and are referenced throughout the book.

*In-house electricians check the dazzling chandelier that overhangs the Durbar Hall. The present chandelier replicates the original one by Ostler, conceived by Lutyens*













*Sculptures of 'parisorted' elephants are a striking Indian feature at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. This motif was a Raj favourite (Photo by Ram Raman)*



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- The only portraits of British rulers of India to hang in the lived spaces of the Rashtrapati Bhavan are of the Mountbattens, Lord Mountbatten being the first governor general of independent India*









*Guardsmen lower the tricolour that is raised above the dome whenever the president is in residence (Photo by Joginder Singh)*













COVER. The President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, leaves the Rashtrapati Bhavan for the Republic Day Parade, 2016, along with the president of France, Francois Hollande, India's chief guest at the event

BACK COVER. The attendant Dharmender Singh opens the window overlooking the Mughal Garden in the Upper Loggia to let in the evening breeze

ENDPAPERS. A detail of a Mughal-inspired jali at the Rashtrapati Bhavan (Photo by Joginder Singh)





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